

KURT VONNEGUT REPORTS FROM THE PEARLY GATES

# In These Times

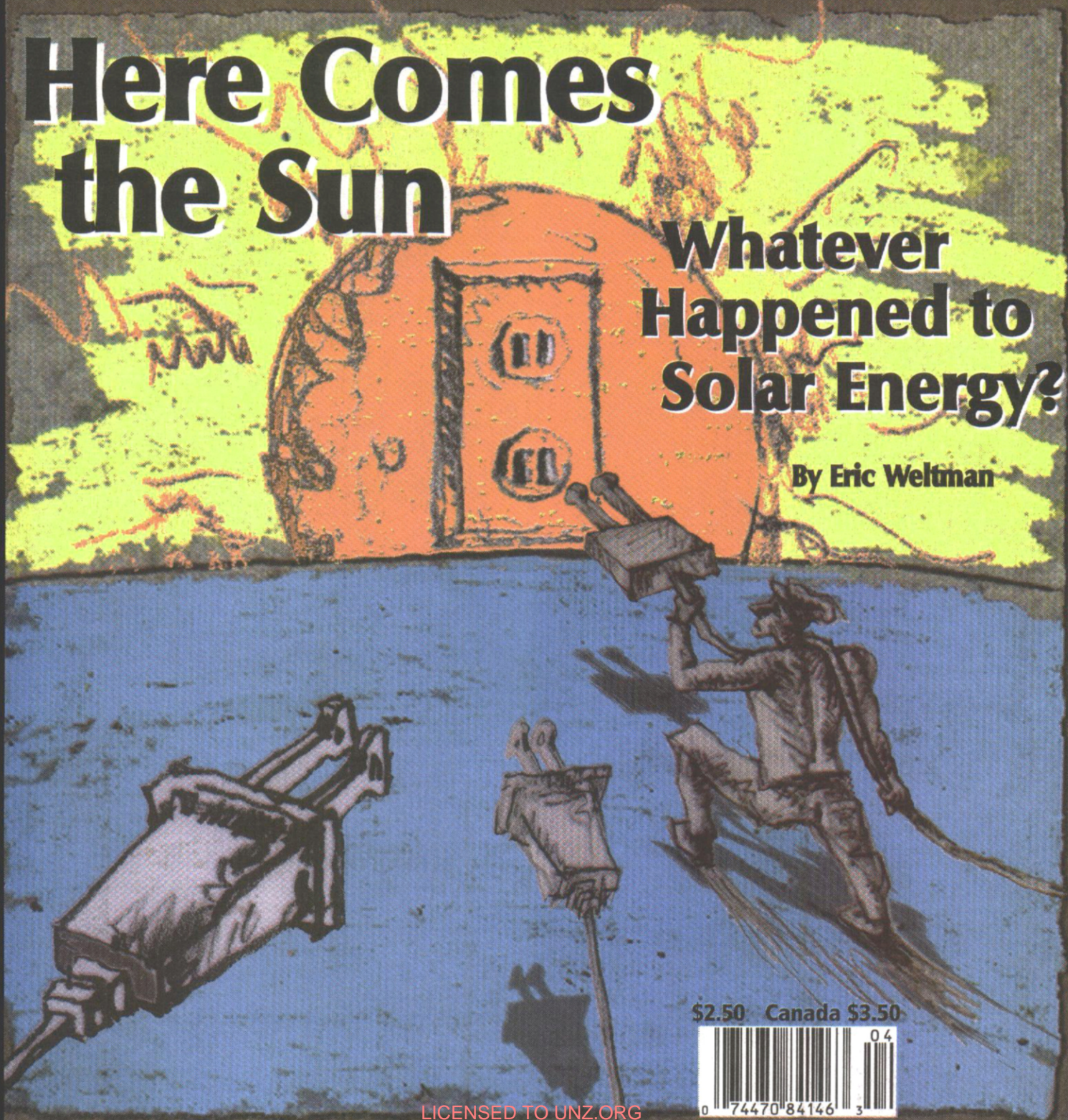
INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

February 7, 2000

## Here Comes the Sun

### Whatever Happened to Solar Energy?

By Eric Weltman



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# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

"... with liberty and justice for all"

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## Letters

### Judging Mumia

We may never know whether Mumia Abu-Jamal is innocent or guilty, but the police and prosecutors who are hellbent on killing him have created the strong appearance that they know he is innocent ("Mumia's Last Chance," December 12). The many irregularities cannot be attributed just to unprofessional conduct or human excesses or errors.

There is barely one iota of the case that is clean. They "forgot" to check Abu-Jamal for gunpowder evidence of firing any gun, and they "forgot" to see if Abu-Jamal's gun was even fired. This raises the suspicion that they did check, found no evidence of Abu-Jamal or his gun doing any shooting and resorted to the "we forgot" tactic. They silenced local and national broadcasts of Abu-Jamal's commentary. They hid the files of the slain police officer from public scrutiny. They presented an apparently faked death certificate for one of the defense witnesses. They threatened witnesses with arrests for past violations.

If they had Abu-Jamal cold, none of this would be necessary.

John Jonik  
Philadelphia

I'm a 51-year-old firefighter in Philadelphia and the only "out of the closet leftist" in a very traditionally conservative organization. In time, most firefighters have accepted me and even listened to my progressive opinions.

But the one issue *In These Times* has supported that is indefensible to anyone in the fire department, including myself, is Mumia Abu-Jamal. You really must research this issue before you write another word defending him. All the evidence points to Abu-Jamal as the killer. Daniel Faulkner was shot execution style with four eyewitnesses. The only impediment to Abu-Jamal getting a fair trial was Abu-Jamal himself. He wasn't after a fair trial. He murdered a cop and wanted to have a political trial.

Investigate the counter arguments on the [www.danielfaulkner.com](http://www.danielfaulkner.com) Web site. Not only are you defending a man who, beyond the shadow of a doubt, committed murder, but you make it that much harder on those people on Death Row who really are innocent.

Harry Schmidt  
Philadelphia

### Critical Standards

We don't need another standard movie review from a publication like *In These Times*. We need an alternative, if not an antidote, to the mainstream discussion. The entertainment industry follows the same propaganda model as the rest of the mass media, which means all debate is subtly narrowed. In reviewing the latest Scorsese movie, *Bringing out the Dead*, Joshua Rothkopf missed the opportunity to open the discussion to larger issues ("Critical Condition," November 28).

The thing about Scorsese is that, while Hollywood sells redemption, he actually believes in it. The relationship between Scorsese and Hollywood is quite reminiscent of the relationship between Michelangelo and the Vatican. A master craftsman with a genuine and fervent faith put to work for the franchise. The nature of the faith at hand—why popular media might want to sell the idea of redemption—is the real story, one that every Scorsese film invites us to discuss.

C.J. Welton  
Chicago

**Joshua Rothkopf replies:** It is exactly this kind of inclination—to portray Scorsese as a penitent Michelangelo persevering in an uneasy relationship with "the franchise"—that informs most of the lazy mainstream coverage of his work. And is it really such a provocative point? Hollywood sells Scorsese as a saint because he lends his studio a pre-fab integrity that even he has now come to substitute for relevancy. Not to critically engage the picture itself would be the ultimate disservice to both our readers and the filmmaker, whose recent effort demonstrates not passion but a sad decline. You need blind faith to suggest Scorsese's talent hasn't suffered under the mantle of cinema martyr—one that you would put on him and have us discuss instead of the film.

### Winter Break

We're taking a two-week vacation following publication of this issue. The next issue of *In These Times* you receive will arrive in a month and will be dated February 21.

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www.inthesetimes.com

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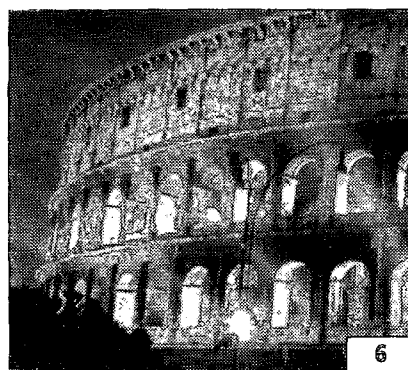
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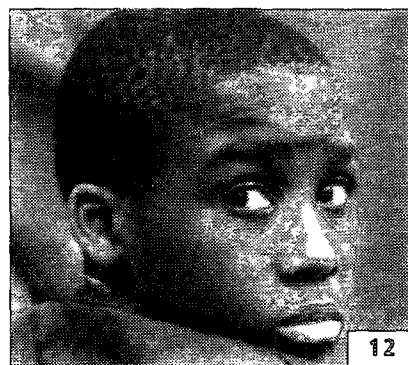
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A special report from the Pearly Gates.

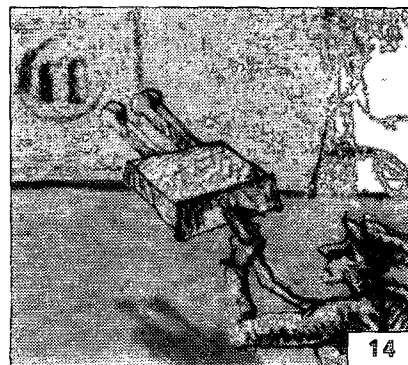
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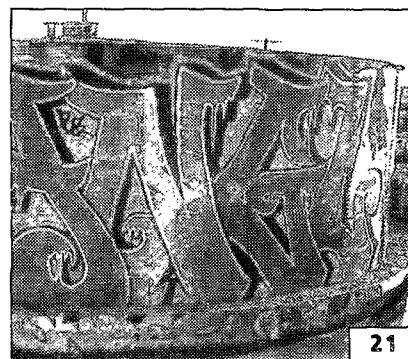
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# A 21st Century Plague?

## Britain's mad cows may harbinger the deaths of millions

**T**he scale of the public health threat posed by Mad Cow disease and other transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) may not be known for years to come. In Britain, the death toll resulting from Mad Cow—or, more precisely, its human manifestation, new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (nvCJD)—could be catastrophic. Here in the United States, chronic wasting disease, a TSE found in deer and elk, may pose a threat to those who eat infected animals.

No one is sure to what extent the public is at risk from TSEs, which are caused by little-understood proteins called prions. The prevalence of the disease in livestock populations is still unknown. How humans are infected with a TSE from other species is undetermined. And the disease in humans is difficult to track, since it may take decades from the time of initial infection to show any symptoms.

**M**ad Cow—or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)—appears to have originated from the common practice of feeding livestock high-protein feed supplements derived from rendered slaughterhouse waste, some of which was from TSE-infected animals. By recycling TSEs—which occur naturally in mammals but are extremely rare—into the food supply, an epidemic was touched off. In Britain, nearly 50 people have been diagnosed with nvCJD, a disease whose associated prion is nearly identical to the prion that causes Mad Cow. But those numbers may be deceptively low due to the disease's long incubation period and because the victims appear to have been exposed before 1986, when Mad Cow was discovered in British cattle.

To measure the extent of the problem, for the past two years British government scientists have been performing biopsies on tonsils, one of the body parts that contains the nvCJD prion. The results have not been made public. But statements from those familiar with the studies are not reassuring. In August, John Pattison, chairman of the government's Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, predicted that the number of people infected with nvCJD could reach millions. In December, Lord Justice Phillips, who has been heading an inquiry into the govern-

A sheep's head and other animal parts await rendering at Valley Proteins, Inc. in Baltimore.



By Joel Bleifuss

ment's mishandling of the crisis, said the current cases may be the just "tip of the iceberg." And the BBC has reported that a study by the Royal Society, Britain's premier scientific body, has estimated the death toll might reach 13 million.

Making matters worse, theories have emerged that some people who contract nvCJD may get it not from eating infected meat but from secondary infections. Last July, John Collinge, a member of the Spongiform Encephalopathy

Advisory Committee, wrote in *The Lancet* that he expected the human epidemic to "evolve over decades." He went on to raise concerns that the infectious prions might be transmitted "via blood transfusion, tissue donation, and, since prions resist routine sterilization, contamination of surgical instruments." He also raised the disturbing specter that other species of livestock may be infected. "The theoretical possibility that BSE prions might have transferred to other species and continue to present a risk to human health cannot be excluded," he wrote.

**M**ad Cow prions or their TSE cousins have not been found in the U.S. cattle population. (However, testing by the U.S. Department of Agriculture is so inadequate that such a statement is meaningless.) But a TSE specific to deer and elk, chronic wasting disease, is endemic in parts of Colorado and Wyoming and has been found on game ranches in Montana and Oklahoma.

Chronic wasting disease was first observed in 1967 in captive mule deer, which were subsequently released into the



MICHELLE GIENOW



wild. One theory has it that the captive deer were exposed to sheep that carry an ovine form of TSE known as scrapie, which is relatively commonplace. Another is that the deer contracted the disease by eating feed that contained rendered protein from an infected animal. In parts of Colorado and Wyoming it affects as many as 8 percent of the deer and 1 percent of the elk.

At least two young hunters, who ate and dressed deer, have come down with CJD. And a third, a young woman who had eaten venison from a deer shot in Maine, also contracted the

## **A study by the Royal Society, Britain's premier scientific body, has estimated the death toll might reach 13 million.**

disease. Because CJD is normally a disease of the old, the youth of the current victims raises the strong possibility that they contracted the disease through infected deer.

Paul Brown, an expert on TSEs at the National Institutes of Health, has told John Stauber, author of *Mad Cow U.S.A.*, that deer hunters must be out of their minds to be consuming deer in areas where chronic wasting disease is prevalent. That message, however, has not gotten out to the general public. "The failure of state and federal agencies to take swift action and warn hunters about potential risks of chronic wasting disease is inexcusable," Stauber says. "The best scientific minds on this issue have failed to adequately warn the public, and in this instance deer hunters, of the deadly risks of these types of diseases."

Why the silence? One reason could be that state wildlife departments are heavily dependent on the income received from licenses for big game. The Colorado Wildlife Division maintains that chronic wasting disease does not affect humans, but advises hunters to "wear rubber gloves when field dressing carcasses, minimize handling of brain and spinal column and wash hands afterward" and to "avoid consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen and lymph nodes of harvested animals."

"The best available science at this time does not indicate a significant threat to human health as result of chronic wasting disease," Montana state epidemiologist Tod Damrow told the *Billings Gazette*. The problem is that there is no available science.

**V**igorous preventive measures to stop the spread of TSEs could threaten the bottom line of entire industries (meat and human blood products to name two), which has led regulatory agencies to put the health of the industry above the public's. The federal bodies that have been entrusted with protecting the public health, the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration, have taken different approaches to this disease and the threat it poses. Meanwhile, the USDA, which regulates animal feeding practices, continues to treat the threat as a PR problem.

One of the hunters who was diagnosed with CJD had been a big blood plasma donor, with his blood being pooled with

others' and used in 121 products like clotting factor for hemophiliacs, which are sold in 20 countries. Beginning in 1993, products made from blood coming from someone with CJD were recalled. That policy cost the blood industry, including the American Red Cross, millions of dollars and was abandoned in 1998, when the CDC determined that there was no evidence that blood from CJD victims was unsafe. On the other hand, there was no evidence that the blood was safe. In effect, the CDC was "equating absence of evidence as evidence of absence" says Tom Pringle, a molecular biologist and webmaster of [www.mad-cow.org](http://www.mad-cow.org), which has become the definitive Web site on TSE.

"The politics and economics of it is that they don't want recalls, and if CJD is more common that means more of the donors have it and the risk to the blood supply is higher."

The CDC has concentrated its efforts on testing those stricken with TSE symptoms for the presence of nvCJD, which is linked to the consumption of British mad cows. But anyone who contracted a TSE from exposure to either deer with chronic wasting disease or cattle infected with an American strain of BSE would not test positive for nvCJD.

"The CDC is playing this public relations game, focusing on nvCJD and ignoring the possibility that chronic wasting disease in humans resembles the type of CJD we already have in the United States and not nvCJD," Stauber says. "The federal government and the meat industry have attempted to depict TSEs as foreign diseases, so that then journalists and the public will assume it can't happen here. But we already have TSE diseases in sheep, mink, deer, elk, humans and possibly in cattle and pigs. And we continue to engage in risky livestock feeding practices, like weaning calves on cattle blood protein, that could put us in a similar situation as Great Britain."

The FDA is being more proactive than the CDC, worried that nvCJD contracted in Britain by American visitors could contaminate the U.S. blood supply. (An import ban on British beef is already in place here.) In June, the FDA's TSE Advisory Committee voted 12 to 9 to prohibit Americans who spent six months in Britain between January 1980 and December 1986 from donating or selling blood. This policy will go into effect April 17 and is expected to affect about 2 percent of U.S. blood donors.

For its part, the USDA has failed to institute a complete ban on the practice of feeding rendered animal protein to other animals (rather than the current partial ban on feeding rendered ruminants to other ruminants). Instead, the agency has spent time preparing a secret PR strategy for when the first mad cow is found in the United States. According to documents released to the Center for Food Safety under the Freedom of Information Act, the department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has put together a 27-member BSE Response Team, which will be flown to a "situation room" at BSE Headquarters—an underground bunker in Riverdale, Maryland—in the event that BSE is found in the U.S. cattle population. Once a case is confirmed, 24 hours will be spent giving special briefings to unnamed "select industry and trading partners." Then the public will be told that something has gone terribly wrong. ■



## A New Interventionism

By David Moberg

**C**orporate globalization has called into question the sovereignty of national governments, as global capital outvotes citizens. But there is another globalization, a growing recognition that individual human rights and the right of people to democratic self-government transcend national sovereignty. Indeed, more than ever, a government's legitimacy rests on its recognition of individual rights and some system of democratic accountability.

The elevation of human rights as a principle in international affairs is one of the great accomplishments of the late 20th century. A priority of this new century should be expanding protection of human rights, along with heading off deadly conflicts and reducing inequality. How those rights should be enforced is not obvious, but clearly the left must go beyond its traditional defense of self-determination and establish a definition of principles for international intervention in the affairs of other countries.

Ideally, human rights could be defended equally everywhere in the world. But popular struggles within countries, however uneven, are the best guarantee of rights. A multinational outside force faces severe limits in protecting human rights. Such enforcement ultimately depends on the most powerful nations, especially the United States, which have a checkered record of defending those rights. A U.N. report recently condemned both the United Nations and the United States for failing to act decisively to stop genocide in Rwanda in 1994. The killing was ignored because black Africans are of marginal interest to the major world powers.

Old-fashioned realpolitik is unavoidable: Despite abuse of civilians, the United States and Europe won't intervene in Chechnya against Russia, as they did in Kosovo against Serbia, in part because it would risk a major conflict. While acting through the United Nations may make interventions less fickle and inequitable, the imbalance of

power there still warps international relations. The United States, as the most powerful nation, has a responsibility to create a more uniform and accountable system, not to abuse its power.

As the use of economic sanctions has increased, so has the debate on when they are justified. Though American business prefers a world with no sanctions to interfere with commerce, sanctions can be deployed as a weapon that targets elites (seizing foreign assets, cutting off military supplies) and minimizes harm to innocent civilians. They can work—as they did in South Africa—with careful political and

ever legitimacy they had, ordinary people suffer without much hope of long-term gain.

Beyond military intervention or sanctions, the United States could do more for global human rights by taking a few positive steps: promoting human and labor rights through global economic institutions; ratifying key International Labor Organization conventions on workers rights; curbing the international arms trade (where the United States is the main profiteer); expanding our extremely niggardly foreign aid budget to reward countries that make progress on human rights; ratifying international conventions on the rights of women and children, the International Criminal Court and prohibition of land mines; and paying our U.N. dues in full.

If the United States wants human rights respected around the world, then it must start respecting them at

### The left must go beyond defending national self-determination and establish principles for international intervention.

diplomatic groundwork. But sanctions must be judged on their effectiveness, not their political appeal. In Cuba the United States has been driven by hostility to Castro's socialism, not his human rights offenses. While sanctions against Iraq and Serbia are losing what-

home. When the interests of American corporations conflict with human rights around the world—in Burmese pipeline projects or Chinese sweatshops—the United States must be willing to stand up to protect those rights. ■

Terry LaBan





## New Sensation

### Vladimir Putin charms Russia

By Fred Weir

MOSCOW—"The Russian voters like to create sensations, and they did not let us down," said longtime Kremlin insider and market reformer Anatoly Chubais, surveying the unexpected political shift wrought by the December 19 parliamentary elections. "This is the second coming of liberalism in Russia."

That may be a bit overdrawn, but there is no doubt that Russians stunned the world by voting in droves for Unity, a pro-Kremlin party whose only issue is to give unqualified support to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, President Boris Yeltsin's anointed heir. They also confounded observers by vaulting the Union of Right Wing Forces, a newly formed coalition of veteran market reformers, including Chubais, into the 450-seat Duma with a healthy caucus of about 30 members.

Leaders of the two parties are natural allies and say they will cooperate in the Duma, where they expect to command a formidable bloc of at least 150 seats. "It is quite possible that, for the first time in post-Soviet history, there will be a working majority in parliament that actually supports the president," says Sergei Tarasenko, an independent political scientist. "This is a watershed in our political history."

The Duma has little power in Russia's Kremlin-centered political system, so the voting was mainly viewed as a dress rehearsal for next June's presidential election. If the parliamentary campaign is any guide, that contest is going to be a down-and-dirty fight to the finish. Election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe pronounced the parliamentary polls relatively fair, but complained about Russian state-owned

TV's "very biased" coverage, which promoted Unity and savaged all the others. "The pre-election period was marked by a campaign in which candidates and the media waged negative attacks on their opponents, often crossing the line to slander and libel," says the OSCE post-election report.

For Putin, the Duma vote is a powerful launching pad for his campaign to replace the aging and ailing Yeltsin. There is little doubt that Unity's ability to snatch 23 percent of the vote was based almost entirely on the poker-faced and immensely popular prime minister's endorsement. Appointed last August in

Fatherland-All Russia, a political vehicle for ambitious Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and several powerful regional leaders. It took a disappointing 12 percent of the vote, and is expected to net about 70 seats in the new Duma.

Just 4 months ago, Primakov was Russia's most popular politician and seemed set for a clear run at the presidency. He had won his reputation during his nine months as prime minister by stabilizing Russia's crisis-ridden economy, launching criminal probes into Kremlin corruption and loudly criticizing NATO's attack on Yugoslavia last spring. But now it appears Primakov may have been crushed by the Putin bulldozer before even reaching the presidential starting line.

The good news for the Kremlin ends there. The Communist Party, the perennial phoenix of Russian politics, pulled down more votes than ever before and will control a huge bloc of about 160 seats in the Duma. "Predictions of the Communist Party's demise have been greatly exaggerated," says Boris Kagarlitsky, an expert with the Institute of Comparative Political Systems in Moscow. "It's going to be a force to reckon with for a long time to come."

Only two other parties made it past the legal 5 percent hurdle to take seats in the Duma. Ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the liberal Yabloko party each polled about 6 percent, which will give both a marginal presence in the deeply divided parliament.

The election results show a starkly polarized Russian society that is inclined to rapid mood swings. "Putin is looking very good at the moment, but can he maintain his momentum for five months in this very tough social atmosphere?" Fyodorov asks. "Just one serious military setback in Chechnya, or another economic crisis, and his tide will run out overnight." ■



Prime Minister Vladimir Putin: the heir apparent?

one of Yeltsin's endless government reshuffles, the 47-year-old former KGB operative has proved surprisingly resilient. In October, he launched a military invasion of Chechnya—which won the approval of most Russians, who are sick of their country's decade-long slide into poverty and disorder. "The coat-tails of Putin have proved irresistible," says Valery Fyodorov, an analyst with the independent Center for Political Trends in Moscow. "At least for the moment, people see him as a strong, capable figure who will restore Russia's strength and prestige."

Another surprise dished out by Russian voters was the poor showing of

DMITRI DUKHANIN/NEWSMAKERS



## Double Bind

A Colombian mayor is caught in the middle of the civil war

By Steven Dudley

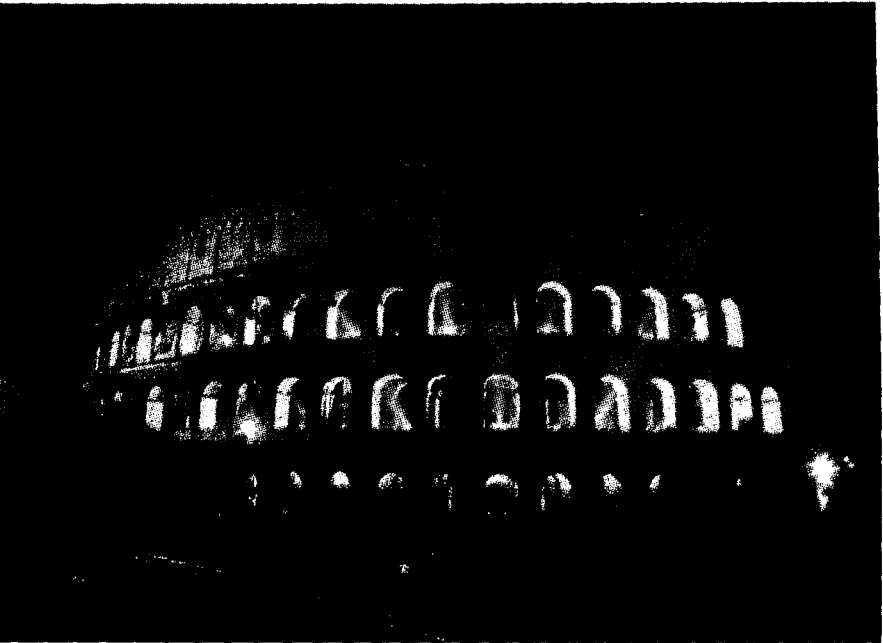
SAN PABLO, COLOMBIA—To most people, Daniel Mancera would be an intimidating man. Standing over six-feet tall with broad shoulders, the mayor of this small town in central Colombia seems more like a football player than a politician. But Mancera is nervous. Despite two fans blowing on his pudgy face, he is sweating. "The truth of the matter is, I see the paramilitaries walking around all the time," Mancera says, tapping the desk anxiously. "But what can I do?"

Mancera was elected mayor of this riverfront town in February 1999, after left-wing guerrillas took the previous mayor and all 10 City Council members captive and forced them to resign. Now Mancera is being squeezed between the guerrillas and the paramilitaries.

"You have to think twice about everything you do," Mancera says. "The minute you compromise with one side, you have the other on top of you."

Mancera's predicament is common in Colombia. Over the past two years, an average of one mayor per month has been assassinated, mostly by paramilitaries or guerrillas. Dozens of others are routinely kidnapped, and almost half of Colombia's 1,080 mayors have had their lives threatened.

Vast coca fields lie just miles from Mancera's office, where both rebels and paramilitaries finance their forces by taxing the local drug traffickers. For years, San Pablo was a guerrilla stronghold where the country's largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN), controlled the area. During the past year, however, paramilitaries have sent hundreds of their soldiers to San Pablo and taken control of the urban center. Still, guerrillas operate in much of the countryside and, according to



ANTONELLO NUSCA/GAMMA/NEWSMAKERS

**Beacon of Hope:** Opponents of the death penalty have adopted the Colosseum—site of the Roman Empire's gruesome bloodsports—as a symbol for the movement. For the next year, lights will shine from the ruins for 48 hours each time a government renounces capital punishment or a prisoner's life is spared. On December 17, the Colosseum was illuminated when North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt commuted Death Row inmate Wendell Flowers' sentence to life in prison. Flowers had been scheduled to die on December 23. The campaign, supported by the United Nations, the Italian government, the Vatican and Amnesty International, equates cultural tolerance of executions with Rome's mania for gladiators and their death matches.

Kristin Kolb

locals, the paramilitaries and rebels are fighting for control over the coca fields that dot the countryside at the base of the Serrania mountains. Mancera has little real power considering the forces that surround him.

Colombia's 40-year-old civil war has not always targeted the local politicians. Up to the mid-'80s, the political parties appointed the mayors where they had won the largest percentage of the vote. The mayors then simply carried out the wishes of the party bosses. But in 1984, the government passed a measure making the mayor a popularly elected position and simultaneously giving the local governments more control over the allocation of their budgets. Mancera insists that he administrates San Pablo's \$1.5 million budget. While the mayor may not take orders from the armed groups, if he steers his projects too far from theirs, he could run into trouble.

About 500 yards from the mayor's office on a dusty soccer field, the paramilitary chieftain, "Popeye," has called

a meeting of local street vendors. More than 200 vendors have shown up for the meeting—which was ostensibly called to discuss security issues—some attendees are still holding their Styrofoam coolers packed with ice cream. "All these people are here because they support us," Popeye says as his six armed guards mingle with the crowd.

Popeye is a short man with a military crew cut and jagged teeth. He says he came to San Pablo to start his own cattle ranching business. But he soon became fed up with the rebels' extorting money from him and his neighbors and decided to seek help from the paramilitary groups that had taken over several towns 50 miles down river from San Pablo.

Human rights observers say that over the past year, the paramilitaries under Popeye's command have killed more than 40 people in San Pablo. When asked, the paramilitary leader does not shy away from his group's accomplishments. "In the beginning there were a lot of dead people," he says, "because as



you know very well, in a war there has to be some death."

Despite this, Popeye says he's gained the confidence of the citizenry. Since the paramilitaries started their bloody campaign to take over the area, Popeye says that the people have begun paving roads and putting in stoplights, and investors have begun looking at San Pablo to exploit its rich mineral reserves that have remained untapped due to the guerrilla presence in the area. "I have had very little contact with the mayor," Popeye claims. "My contact is with the people. In fact, I think the people ask me for more favors than they do the mayor."

The citizens of San Pablo are afraid to speak about Popeye or his guards. And Mancera says he is powerless to fight the paramilitaries since the local armed forces won't arrest them. The 22-year-old police chief, Jose Nace Leon—whose office is right next to Mancera's—

claims that in the month since he has arrived, he has not seen any paramilitaries. Nace also says his predecessor arrested a paramilitary leader or two. But he could not provide the details of when or where these arrests occurred. "The police know we're here," Popeye says. "But they're also aware of the fact that we've made a lot of changes around here. Maybe because of this, they don't come after us."

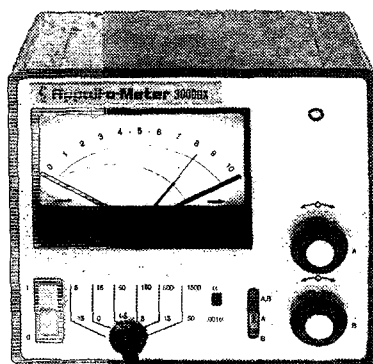
Despite the power struggle swirling around him, Mancera says his office remains pretty much the same: filled with people wanting better roads, medical supplies and more school books. He



APPEL TIEMPO

Relatives grieve for a victim of a paramilitary attack in San Pablo.

says he tries to tend to their needs one by one, even though he does not know how much longer he will be allowed to hold his post. "When you have conflict with them," Mancera says, "you become a marked man. And wherever you go, they'll follow you." ■



## Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

### God's Work 6.3

If you're looking for the hot new frontier in tax-free retailing, don't look to the World Wide Web. The true pioneers are in church. The *Wall Street Journal* recently described the current boom in church-owned retail stores, which have transformed themselves from sleepy distributors of rosaries and crucifixes into tax-free superstores featuring such non-religious goodies as Beanie Babies and gourmet coffee. "This may sound grandiose," said one former Microsoft worker turned Christian coffee importer, "but I really believe God wants to harness capitalism and market forces for his purposes."

### Red Alert 7.1

The biggest threat faced by the homeless? It's not hunger, street violence, infectious diseases or even inclement weather. No, according to Manhattan

Institute fellow and *Forbes* columnist Peter Huber, the main thing keeping the homeless up at night these days is the fear of being shoved into a warm bed by over-generous authorities. "Yes, there are still those who sleep on the sidewalk," Huber informs his presumably non-homeless *Forbes* readers in a recent page-long paean to progress. "Compassionate and exacerbated in equal measure, big-city mayors now enlist the police to force warm beds upon them. It's the sidewalk, not the shelter, that's scarce now."

### Trade Barriers 6.7

Speaking of the wonders of progress, the World Wide Web has now turned civil unrest into a profit-making opportunity. A week after the teargas cleared in Seattle following the World Trade Organization protests, *Wired News* found nearly two dozen "Battle in Seattle"-related items up on the auction site eBay—including a "teargas fun pack" featuring a spent teargas canister,

exploded concussion grenades, rubber bullets and a billy club that the seller, a University of Washington student, explained "probably broke over some poor protester's head."

"I started picking them up and all of a sudden, a word popped into my head: eBay," explained Adam Cohn, the enterprising student. "What started off as a joke has turned into a money-making opportunity." Well, almost. *Wired News* later reported that eBay had pulled most of the auctions off its site because they violated eBay rules about weapons sales and that some of the items, even in their worn-out condition, might still be considered property of the police.



TERRY LABAN

# Father Knows Best

Welfare reformers want to push marriage on poor moms

By Neil deMause

NEW YORK—When the House passed the Fathers Count Act by a lopsided vote of 328 to 93 on November 10, it was hailed by Beltway conservatives and liberals alike as a landmark step toward dealing with those left out of the welfare debate: fathers. If passed by the Senate, the legislation would provide \$160 million over five years to organizations that provide men with job search training, teach them parenting skills and “promote marriage.”

For the bill’s backers, bringing fathers back into the fold is perhaps the most important step that can be taken for poor families. “Violent criminals are overwhelmingly males who grew up without fathers, including up to 60 per-

cent of rapists, 75 percent of adolescents charged with murder, and 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions,” testified Wade Horn, a former Bush administration official who is now president of the National Fatherhood Initiative.

When the National Organization for Women attacked the bill for forcing women into marriages, bill sponsor Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-Conn.) shot back: “NOW is ignoring what is now broadly accepted by liberals, conservatives and moderates, that children in single-parent families are far more likely to suffer abuse, do poorly in school and have poorer prospects to live above the poverty line in their adult life.”

But are they? Feminists and economists have long been critical of twisted statistics on the subject of single parenting. Princeton University professor Sara McLanahan, whose book *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* is often used to buttress pro-marriage arguments, has noted that “illegitimate” children whose parents were both present for their childhoods do just as well as

those whose parents were married at their births. Furthermore, children whose mothers remarry do just as poorly as those whose mothers remain single. The key, it seems, is not marriage, or even fatherhood, but parental attention and financial and geographic stability.

A greater concern to many is domestic violence. Studies have found that as many as 20 percent of welfare recipients are currently being abused by their partners. And shelter directors worry that new welfare restrictions are leading women to stay in abusive relationships to keep a roof over their heads.

For his part, Horn insists that the goal of the legislation is not to force women to marry their batterers, but fund programs like San Diego’s “Boot Camp for New Dads” that promote parenting and relationship skills for fathers. But welfare researcher Lisa Dodson warns that these programs could end up promoting exactly the type of masculinity that is contributing to some men’s problems.

Promoting marriage for poor moms has been a major theme of welfare legislation for years—the 1996 welfare reform law included a directive to states to “encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent households,” and Al Gore recently sought a federal crackdown on deadbeat dads. But actual legislation has been few and far between: Wisconsin’s short-lived “bridefare” (in which women would receive bonuses for getting married) was a notorious failure, and proposals by Horn and New York City deputy welfare commissioner Andrew Bush to establish preferences for married parents in housing, Head Start and welfare benefits have so far fallen on deaf ears. (Horn, in fact, says he no longer believes in preferences for married couples.)

While Dodson agrees with the need for economic programs targeted at poor men, the pro-marriage tilt to the legislation baffles her. “From what I’ve seen in low-income communities,” she says, “the reasons that young men and women decide a relationship can’t continue are very good ones. To me, promoting marriage is

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

THIS WEEK: A PEEK BEHIND THE SCENES AT THIS MODERN WORLD!

WE’RE HERE PREPARING FOR OUR NEXT CARTOON... YOU ALL KNOW BIFF, OF COURSE... HE’S OUR BUFFOONISH CARICATURE OF CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT, OUR RESIDENT STRAW MAN...

GOT THIS WEEK’S LINES MEMORIZED YET, BIFF?



DON’T WORRY, FRANK -- WE’LL STILL BRING YOU BACK FOR THE OCCASIONAL RETROSPECTIVE!

NOW, AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW, I PLAY THE KNOW-IT-ALL PENGUIN WHO ALWAYS GETS THE FINAL WORD! HEH-- IF ONLY REAL LIFE WERE LIKE THAT! OF COURSE, HERE ON THE SET, I’VE GOT THE BENEFIT OF A BLATANTLY BIASED, PRE-SCRIPTED ENCOUNTER...



AHEM! “SPARKY, I DON’T SEE WHAT’S WRONG WITH TEACHING CHRISTIAN CREATION MYTHS, IN LIEU OF ACTUAL SCIENCE!”

GREAT WORK, BIFF! SEE YOU ON THE SET!

IN REAL LIFE, BIFF SPENDS MOST EVENINGS STUDYING THE WORK OF NOAM CHOMSKY!



...WHICH BRINGS US TO OUR FINAL STOP... AFTER ALL, WE CERTAINLY CAN’T CONCLUDE OUR LITTLE PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN WITHOUT DROPPING IN ON TOM TOMORROW-- WHO SPENDS MOST OF HIS TIME ALONE IN HIS LITTLE ROOM, STARRING AT HIS COMPUTER SCREEN--



HERE IN THE MAKEUP DEPARTMENT IS FRANK WILLIAMS-- THE ACTOR WHO PLAYS BILL CLINTON FOR US!

HI FOLKS! PERSONALLY, I THINK THIS CARTOON IS TOO HARD ON CLINTON-- BUT HEY, IT’S BEEN STEADY WORK! AND I’M NOT GOING TO HAVE MUCH OF THAT NEXT YEAR!



--TRYING TO THINK OF NEW WAYS TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP-ROOTED CONVICTION THAT HE’S SMARTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE...

MUTTER, MUTTER... WHY DON’T THEY LISTEN TO ME? I’LL SHOW THEM! I’LL SHOW THEM ALL! MUTTER, MUTTER...



www.thismodernworld.com



almost like promoting religion—people have to choose what is right for them.”

“We’re identifying a problem that doesn’t exist,” adds Jody Raphael, author of the forthcoming book, *Saving Bernice: Battered Women, Welfare and Poverty*. Instead of pushing marriage, she says, legislators should be looking at “poor men’s lack of participation in the economy, and that they’re in and out of prisons and jails. The marginality of poor men’s lives is the major problem.” ■

## Union Planet

### Saturn workers vote out management collaborators

By Jane Slaughter

DETROIT—The Saturn experiment—American industry’s most advanced version of union-management collaboration—took a blow on December 19 when United Auto Workers members in Spring Hill, Tennessee, ratified by 89 percent a new contract that eliminates some of the company’s most cooperative features.

The new pact moves Saturn’s 7,300 workers much closer to a contract like that of General Motors’ 200,000 other blue-collar employees. “I attribute [the new contract] to rank-and-file power,” says Tom Hopp, who led an unsuccessful

## Norwich Severs Ties to Indonesian Military

NORTHFIELD, VERMONT—In a stunning turnaround, Vermont’s Norwich University announced in late December that it was “severing all formal ties with the Indonesian military” and “will no longer accept payments” for Indonesian soldiers to attend the country’s only private military college. “Norwich has finally admitted that there was an institutional relationship between the Indonesian army and the University,” says faculty member Mark Byrnes.

The Norwich-Indonesia program was set up in 1997 by University President Thomas Schneider after a trip to Indonesia, where he met with top military officials, some of whom had close ties to Kopassus—the elite special forces notorious for its brutality (see “School Ties,” October 31). Two Indonesian generals, A.M. Hendropriyono and Zacky Anwar Makarim—both of whom have been implicated in gross human rights abuses—visited Norwich.

At least four Indonesian graduates of Norwich served in East Timor around the time of the August independence referendum, when the Indonesian army rampaged through the small country. Another 11 Indonesian undergraduates currently enrolled at Norwich listed their address as the headquarters of Kopassus.

Although the Norwich announcement marks a dramatic change, it is in part symbolic. According to Gen. Dadi Susento, defense attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in Washington, the military had suspended funding of the Norwich students in September. The move followed President Clinton’s order to end all U.S. cooperation with the Indonesian military. Norwich denies it knew that the Indonesian military had already cut off the students.

In its press release, Norwich announced it will seek alternative funding for the current crop of Indonesian students and will “also offer cadet scholarships for two students from East Timor ... [to] demonstrate our commitment to helping the world’s newest nation as it sets about the onerous task of nation building.”

Norwich instructor Mitch Hall commends the change of policy. But, he says, “it was pressure from those who spoke out that changed the balance and showed the university that it was in its self-interest to do the right thing.”

**Terry J. Allen**

campaign to bring Saturn under the GM national agreement in 1998. “We did all the homework and all the legwork, mobilized the workers and elected a group of people who supported our beliefs.”

Until now, Saturn workers earned 12 percent less than other GM workers, with the rest of their income subject

to a “risk and reward” system based on meeting production, quality and training targets. The idea was to tie workers’ incomes to company profits. Some years, the system was lucrative, depending on car sales, but more recently it was not. In 1997, Saturn workers made \$4,000 less than other GM workers.

Saturn also was famous for its

bare-bones contract that spelled out little besides the two parties’ commitment to “consensus.” The entire section on working hours, for instance, read, “To fulfill the objectives of the Saturn philosophy and mission, it will be necessary to have flexible hours of work that meet the needs of the individual as well as Saturn.” In practice, this meant workers rotated between day and night shifts every few days.

In February 1999, workers threw out the cooperative “Vision Team,” which had run Saturn’s union since its inception in the ’80s, and elected a new slate of officers that supported ending the rotating shifts.

Under the new agreement, Saturn workers’ base pay will equal that of other GM workers. This will mean higher pensions too. And the union will increase the number of reps on the shop floor.

Hopp has made it a personal crusade to spread the word about the dangers of Saturn-style unionism to other industries. “Saturn’s contract was bad for labor and bad for workers,” he says. “Any changes to it can be seen as a victory for working people everywhere.” ■



Saturn workers are getting a raise.

# Agent for Change

By Jay Hodges

**T**wenty-eight years ago, Frances Goldin, then editor-in-chief at a New York publishing house, decided she was "wasting her talents with people like Harold Robbins." So with \$5,000 and a commitment to represent "serious, controversial, left-wing, progressive fiction and nonfiction," Goldin launched the Frances Goldin Literary Agency from her one-bedroom apartment on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The agency has since resettled in a Greenwich Village loft, and Goldin worries where in the office she'll place a much-needed addition to the staff.

Goldin, 75, became involved in politics at 18 when she met her soon-to-be husband Morris (who died in 1978). He tutored her in socialism and she joined the Communist Party. In 1950, she ran as the American Labor Party candidate for New York state senate on the same ticket as U.S. Senate candidate W.E.B. Du Bois. She modestly claims it was her involvement in housing issues that won her more votes than Du Bois.

When the party asked her to get involved with school issues, she refused, wanting to continue in the fight for housing rights. "You just don't do that," Goldin says. "You do what you are told. I think that was the beginning of the end for me." She quit the party in 1965, because she felt it had become "the tail of the Democratic dog." "I was a revolutionary," she says.

Goldin still refuses to compromise her principles, an integrity that surfaces in the quality of the authors she represents and the subsequent success of her agency in a publishing environment where independent houses are being lapped up by conglomerates. "We

are an anomaly," she says. "The world's going to hell in a hand basket and here we are thriving."

Part of that success is due to Goldin's dedication to her writers. "As an agent, she's the most supportive person in the world," says feminist author Susan Brownmiller. "She's with you every step of the way." In 1999 alone, several of her clients won recognition for their work: Poet Adrienne Rich received the Lannan Lifetime Literary Achievement Award; Juan Gonzalez earned the

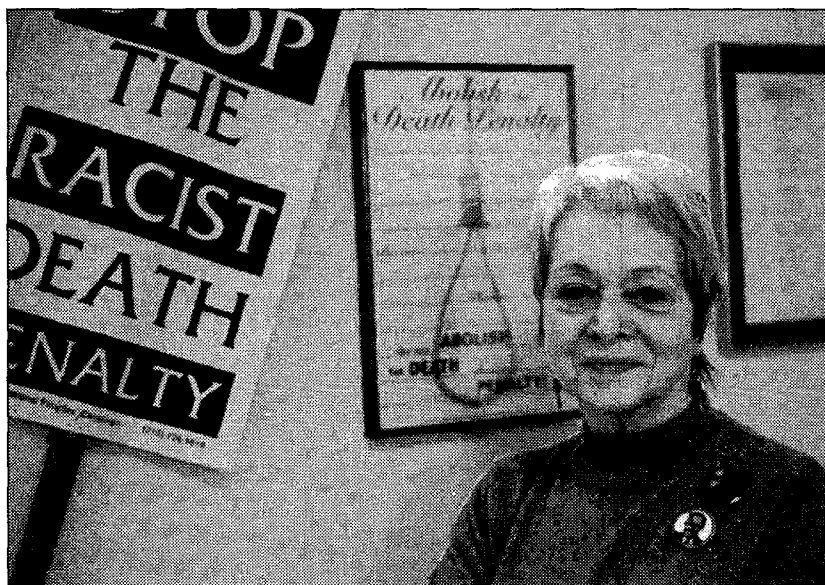
millar recalls, "Helping to support Frances was supporting a panoply of great causes."

The agency's big break came with the signing of novelist Barbara Kingsolver, who had seen Goldin's listing in the *Literary Market Place* that included the line, "Racists, homophobes and sexists need not apply." Since Kingsolver's subsequent literary success, and with the addition of authors like Brownmiller, Dorothy Allison and Martin Duberman to the stable, money is less tight.

Goldin is spreading the wealth. (If not in the weekly poker games she hosts, where in the socialist spirit raises are still limited to 5 cents.) "One of the wonderful things about being successful is that I can give money," she

says. "If I couldn't prove how much I give, the IRS wouldn't believe it, since it's half my salary."

And Goldin gives, gives, gives. She still fights for low-rent housing on the Lower East Side. She was honored by *The Advocate* as one of "Our Best and Brightest Activists," for her work for gay and lesbian rights—a struggle she was involved in long before her two lesbian daughters came out of the closet. And she is on the board of



Frances Goldin in her Greenwich Village office.

George Polk Award for Excellence in Journalism; and Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace's *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* won the Pulitzer Prize for history.

Dressed in sweats, sporting "Free Mumia" and anti-Rudy Giuliani pins, this poker-playing septuagenarian who hitchhikes around Manhattan has been arrested eight times and honored with a manuscript-thick FBI file. She doesn't seem like the type who would negotiate big-money contracts. Though such deals are now commonplace, they were long in the making. It took Goldin nine years to clear \$12,000 a year, and she occasionally had to depend on friends and family, who gladly assisted her. Brown-

FROST'D (From Our Streets Delivered), which helps New York City prostitutes get off the streets and into a new life. But the issue Goldin is most passionate about these days is winning an acquittal for Mumia Abu-Jamal. She became his agent six years ago representing his first book, *Live From Death Row*, and since then has worked continuously on his behalf. "I guess we spend at least two hours a day in this agency on Mumia, and a lot of my time away from work is taken up with the cause," she says.

Goldin has no desire to retire from politics or publishing. But she would like to cut her six-day work week down to four. She laughs, "I could spend the fifth day getting arrested." ■



# Do-It-Yourself Disarmers Win in Court

It took 35,000 ingenious activists and a whole lot of caught-off-guard Seattle cops, but the century appears to be ending on a defiant note. Good cheer even appears to be penetrating the air, thanks to the actions against the WTO. Boy, it takes a lot to get progressives excited.

So as my contribution to the people's own Y2K power surge, let me offer the following story, which has so far not seen a page of print in the progressive press here. It grabbed my attention with these headlines from the Scottish newspapers: "We've Won Nuclear War" and "How Four Middle-Aged Ladies Sank UK Defense."

The four courageous women sat three in a boat and one on a judge's bench.

The three were Angela Zelter, 48, a Brit from London, Ellen Moxley, 63, a Scot, and Bodil Ulla Roder, 45, a Dane. On June 8, they rowed across a Scottish loch and slipped in the window of *Maytime*, a command barge at Faslane Naval base near Lochgoilhead, Argyll. The women, members of the global Ploughshares movement, facing what they knew might be years in jail, were determined to interrupt what they see as the illegal deployment of Britain's nuclear submarine fleet, which is stationed at Faslane and operated from the *Maytime*.

"We thought we'd have three or four minutes before security came on board," says Zelter, who participated in a similar action a few years back, that damaged Hawk jets bound for Indonesia. "In fact, we had close to three hours." They used their time to anoint Her Majesty's computers with superglue, sand and syrup, before throwing the equipment overboard. The women caused approximately \$150,000 in damage to the system that drives Britain's Trident II nuclear submarines. When military police arrived at last, Zelter and friends were remanded into custody and charged with malicious damage and theft.

In October, Sheriff Margaret Gimblett, presiding judge in the local court in Greenock, listened to four and

a half weeks of testimony on the nature of nuclear weapons and the status of international law, then freed the women. "I am only a very junior sheriff," said Gimblett. "I may be totally wrong ... but I have to conclude that the three accused were justified [in their actions]."



Gimblett accepted the defense argument that while Britain was at war with Serbia and Iraq, the deployment of nuclear warheads on a first-strike basis (as at Faslane) amounted to a criminal threat. In her decision, Gimblett cited a 1996 World Court opinion that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is unlawful under all circumstances except as a last resort self-defense to avoid annihilation. "The three took the view that if Trident is illegal, given the horrendous nature of nuclear weapons, they had the obligation in terms of international law to do whatever little they could to [stop it]," she explained.

"It's historic," says Francis Boyle, international law professor at the University of Illinois, who was an expert witness in the case. Britain's deployment of Trident IIs—a first-strike weapon—has never before been considered in light of the World Court's view. "The entire British nuclear weapons establishment has been declared illegal," Boyle says.

Unless it is reversed by a higher court, under the British system of case law this ruling sets a precedent. "If Greenock stands," Boyle says. "Activists could apply it everywhere."

Conservatives were outraged. "Given the kind of signals this nonsense will

have sent out to pacifist loonies everywhere," fumed Phil Gallie, a member of the Scottish Parliament. "There should be a clear warning from the government that attacks on military establishments and installations will not be tolerated."

Gimblett admitted that she was "rather worried about her job," but so far her decision has drawn mostly support from her peers. Scotland's lord advocate has said he intends to refer the case to the High Court for review, but he has done nothing yet. A review would reopen debate on Britain's entire nuclear program, and could stoke nationalist opposition to English nukes on Scottish soil.

Complicating matters, Scotland may soon face not only a British military presence, but an American one as well. As *In These Times* goes to press, the *South China Morning Post* reports that

**It's historic. The entire British nuclear weapons establishment has been declared illegal.**

the U.S. Navy—recently banished from Vieques, Puerto Rico—is planning to use Scotland as a substitute bombing range. A force of U.S. guided-missile cruisers, led by the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, will descend soon on Cape Wrath (Scotland's Northwest tip) where the British government has granted permission to drop high-explosive bombs and missiles, possibly including depleted uranium shells. The British navy uses Garvie (a tiny island off Cape Wrath) and a restricted area on the mainland for live firing practice several times a year. Apparently, they're lending these places to the displaced U.S. Navy.

"Scotland is now at the receiving end of the special relationship between Britain and America," rages John Ainslie of Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Sounds like a call for a people's Y2K surge to me. ■

# Juvenile Crime, Adult Time

## Why are we so afraid of our kids?

By Salim Muwakkil

**O**n November 16, 13-year-old Nathaniel Abraham was convicted of second-degree murder in the fatal shooting of a stranger two years ago, when he was 11. Prosecutors had charged him with first-degree murder after he reportedly confessed. An African-American from one of Pontiac, Michigan's poorest neighborhoods, Nathaniel is the youngest child in the nation to be tried as an adult for a premeditated killing.

He will be sentenced on January 13 and faces a maximum sentence of life in prison with the possibility of parole. He also could receive a "blended sentence" and be jailed until 21, when his case would be reviewed and he could either go free or get additional punishment. The final decision lies with Judge Eugene Arthur Moore.

Nathaniel's trial was roundly condemned by human rights groups, and he has become a symbol for those opposed to the growing trend in this country to prosecute and punish juveniles as if they were adults. His photograph graced the cover of an Amnesty International report that said his trial "makes a mockery of justice and constitutes a violation of international human rights standards for the protection of children."

In particular, Nathaniel's treatment scorns provisions of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which, among other things, provides that anyone under 18 shall not be punished with life imprisonment without possible release. But the United States has not ratified that convention, joining Somalia as the only other U.N. member not to endorse the measure. In fact, the United States seems to be moving in the opposite direction. In the past few years, 46 states have changed their laws to allow juveniles to be tried as adults at the discretion of a judge.

The United States also is among the select few nations that execute child offenders. Amnesty International has documented 19 executions of child offenders since 1990 in six countries: Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United States (Yemen has since outlawed the practice). Ten were killed in the United States, which "has earned the shameful distinction of leading a tiny and dwindling group of perpetrator states" that still execute children, in the words of a December Amnesty report. Since October 1997, the report notes, all four children known to have been put to death in the world were killed in this country.

**W**hy is the industrial world's most prosperous nation so afraid of its kids? This question is even more poignant considering the fact that the whole idea of a juvenile justice system was first put into practice a century ago in the United States. The first true juvenile court was established in 1899 in Cook County, Illinois. It was founded on the principle that since children are not mature—physically, emotionally and intellectually—they should not bear the same statutory responsibility as adults.

These days, however, that notion seems increasingly quaint. Legislators all along the political spectrum are more willing to sentence juveniles to "adult time for adult crime." Why? One reason is the association of youth violence with minority—particularly African-American—children. Perhaps the most salient culprit in this social perception are the major media. "The media are whipping up public fear and this is correlating with the demand for these ineffective, very expensive crime policies that we see proliferating around the country," says Robin Templeton, who heads a Pacific News Service program for youth in the Bay Area. "We have to understand, I believe, that fear of crime is good for media business. And, two, that when media whip up public fear, it creates this demand for ineffective policies."

Templeton traces the trend for harsher juvenile penalties back to the "superpredator" thesis of former Princeton professor and current Brookings Institute ideologue John Dilulio. Combining demographic projections with his notion that institutions that produce decent character are disintegrating, Dilulio forecast a "rising wave of superpredators" primed to prey on society like never before. Dilulio's 1996 book *Body Count*, which he co-authored with former Drug Czar William Bennett and John P. Walters, warned of thickening ranks of juvenile sociopaths, "radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more pre-teen-age boys." Dilulio further described these predators as "fearing neither the stigma of arrest, pains of imprisonment nor the pangs of conscience."

The alarmist tone of this conservative tome echoed in Congress, where Florida Republican Rep. Bill McCollum introduced the "Violent Youth Predator Act," which called for confining children as young as 13 with adult offenders, denying federal funds to states that do not try 13-year-olds as adults and



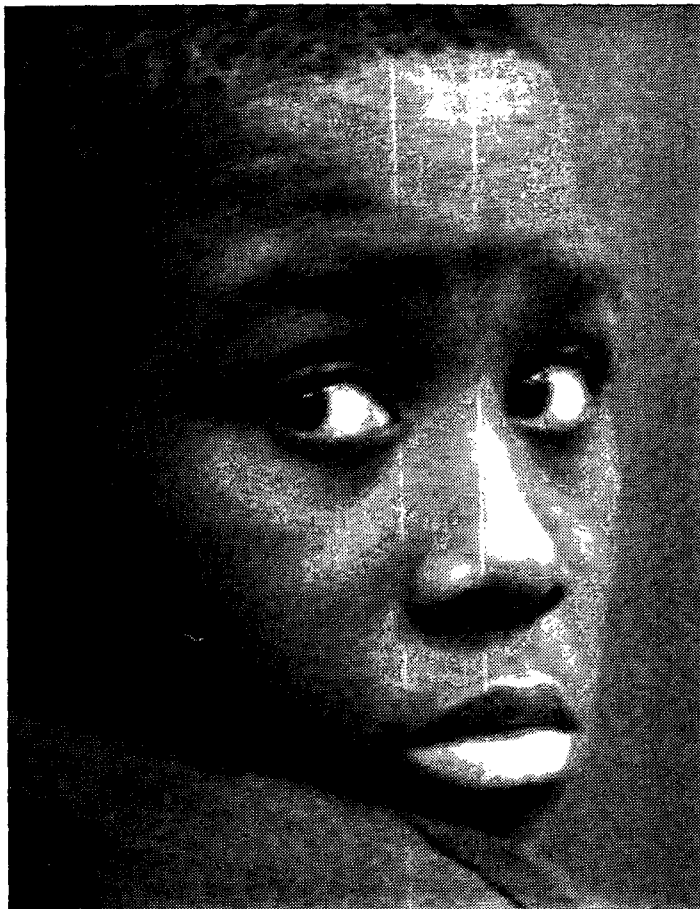
abolishing the federal agency charged with preventing juvenile crime. The bill, which is still being considered, has since been given a less hysterical name, but the stringent provisions remain.

The environment Dilulio describes seems to fit the media portrayals of the inner city, and there's little doubt that there is a racial dimension to the anti-juvenile legislation now being passed so readily across the country. Amnesty International reported last year that black children comprise only 15 percent of the population ages 10 to 17, but account for 50 percent of cases transferred by juvenile courts for trials in adult criminal courts.

**T**he sentencing of children to death also reflects a pervasive pattern of racial discrimination. Two-thirds of the juveniles on Death Row are either black or Hispanic, while two-thirds of the victims are white, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. "The real driving factor is the race of the victim," says Victor Streib, a professor of law at Ohio Northern University who has been tracking the number of juveniles sentenced to death over the past 25 years. He says that people of color are at least four times more likely to be executed.

In the 20th century, 75 percent of all juvenile offenders executed were African-Americans, as was every child executed for rape, according to research conducted by the National Coalition To Abolish the Death Penalty. Of the nine known cases where girls were executed, eight involved African-Americans. The other was an American Indian.

Juvenile executions in the United States began in Massachusetts' Plymouth Colony in 1642 when Thomas Graunger, 17, was executed for reportedly having sex with animals. Of the 19,200 executions held in the United States since 1608, according to the Death Penalty Information Center, 356 have been juvenile offenders. The youngest person ever to be executed was a 10-year-old Cherokee Indian boy, who was hanged in 1885. Since World War II, the youngest was 14-year-old George Stinney, who was electrocuted in 1944 in South Carolina.



## **Nathaniel Abraham has become a symbol for those opposed to the growing trend to prosecute and punish juveniles as if they were adults.**

aspirations. "The idea that there is some sort of superpredator out there is largely a myth," Florida Atlantic University criminologist Randy Bazemore told the *Sun-Sentinel*. "But if you wanted to create a superpredator, you couldn't do any better than taking 14-year-olds and locking them in prison with other criminals."

The creation of the juvenile court a century ago was based on the notion that children are not just little adults, but people who comprehend the world—and think and act—differently. Lacking a perspective deepened by experience, they often fail to weigh risks and consequences and are readily influenced by peers. The most significant difference, however, is that they are redeemable and amenable to positive change.

By deserting this understanding of juvenile behavior in favor of the "superpredator" thesis, American leadership is revealing the hollowness at its core. Americans seem increasingly alienated from their children. From the sound of things, we intend to keep it that way. ■

Over the years, however, a growing body of research and medical advances demonstrated the futility of punishing children like adults, and the United States (along with most other industrialized and developing countries) turned away from those primitive customs. But the startling crime increase in America's inner cities that accompanied the influx of addictive drugs and divestment of resources convinced legislators to revive atavistic practices. More recently, the series of terrifying school shootings has triggered a rush to lower the eligible age for the death penalty in many states.

**F**lorida leads the nation in transferring juvenile delinquents to adult criminal court. But according to a recent report in the Fort Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel*, studies have shown that young offenders sent to adult prison "commit more serious crimes quicker and more often after their release than similar offenders who remain in the juvenile system." While research is still thin, it's logical that exposing impressionable youth to hardened criminals in prison environments would produce more youth with criminal

PAULINE LUBENS/DETROIT FREE PRESS

# Here Comes the Sun

## Whatever happened to solar energy?

By Eric Weltman

**L**ooking back, the worst of the '70s—polyester, Nixon, disco—is remembered, even celebrated. But it's forgotten that in the same decade, amidst the oil shocks and nuclear debacles, the future seemed to belong to solar energy. Indeed, with gas-guzzling SUVs clogging our roads, it's difficult to remember the urgency of that time.

There even once was a day called Sun Day. The idea, recalls organizer Denis Hayes, was "to convey to the American public that there are options, that it is possible to run a modern industrial state on sunshine." On May 3, 1978, Sun Day began with a sunrise ceremony at the United Nations led by Ambassador Andrew Young and continued with hundreds of events across the country. President Carter used the occasion to announce an additional \$100 million in federal solar spending and the installation of a solar water heater on the White House roof. The White House Council on Environmental Quality ambitiously declared, "A national goal of providing significantly more than half of our energy by solar sources by the year 2020 should be achievable."

But then the '80s happened. With the election of Ronald Reagan, solar energy entered a dark age of malign neglect. Reagan eliminated tax credits for solar energy and removed the solar panels from the White House roof. Federal research-and-development funding for solar power fell from \$557 million in 1980 to \$81 million in 1990. At the same time, oil prices plummeted, diminishing demand for alternatives and taking energy off the agenda of the nation and much of the environmental movement. "If oil had remained expensive," Hayes says, "everything would have fallen into place."

Consequently, things now look a lot different than the sunny optimists of the '70s predicted. Consumers pay more for a gallon of bottled water than they do for a gallon of gas, while, at \$20 a ton, coal is cheaper than topsoil. The universe of renewable energy sources—including solar, wind and geothermal power (but not hydroelectric)—provides only 2.1 percent of the nation's electricity. The future isn't much brighter: Absent any new policies, according to federal projections, by 2020 renewable energy is expected to provide just 3 percent of the nation's electricity.



AGOSTON SZUTTS

Of course, the problems of fossil fuels—toxic spills, mining waste, acid rain, smog, etc.—haven't gone away. Meanwhile, a new problem has emerged: global climate change, with its multiple threats of rising sea levels, disrupting agriculture, increasing weather-related disasters and spreading infectious diseases. The scientific consensus is that climate change is happening, and its chief source is carbon dioxide released by the combustion of fossil fuels. The United States accounts for about a quarter of the world's energy consumption, so it's no surprise that this country also is responsible for 24 percent of carbon dioxide emissions—the largest source of which is power plants.

In the past, the world would have turned to the United States for renewable energy solutions. After all, the United States invented photovoltaic (PV) panels, devices that turn sunlight into electricity, and, in the '80s, California produced more than 90 percent of the world's wind energy. But the torch has been seized by Europe and Japan, which support renewable energy with a range of tax benefits, mandates and pricing programs. In fact, the European Union prohibits subsidies for fuels other than renewables. Meanwhile, according to the Worldwatch Institute, wind power is the most rapidly growing source of energy in the world, increasing 20 percent per year since 1990. The Danes have captured half of the market for wind technologies.

But the potential for renewables remains great in the United States. The Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) claims that PV panels covering 0.3 percent of the country, a quarter of the land occupied by railroads, could provide all of the nation's electricity. Likewise, the 11 states stretching between North Dakota and Texas have been



dubbed the "Saudi Arabia of wind energy," with enough gusts to supply more than the nation's electricity consumption.

The American public continues to support renewable energy in survey after survey. Yet renewables face the continued obstacle of the political power of the utility, nuclear and fossil fuels industries. That clout has translated, among other things, into billions of dollars in subsidies in the form of federal research and development, tax benefits and ratepayer bailouts. However, there are several reasons that renewables may finally earn their day in the sun. One is the rising concern over the global climate change, which has spurred the interest of environmental organizations and the foundations that fund them. Another is the restructuring of the electric utility industry.

**A** growing number of states are dismantling the monopolies that have controlled the entire process of electricity generation and distribution, and Congress is contemplating national restructuring legislation. Large industrial customers tout the lower energy prices they say will result from opening up the market to competition. Environmentalists see opportunities, perils and problems in the rush to deregulate.

Deregulation has allowed some consumers to choose "green energy." Since electricity from all sources is mixed up in the utility grid, no one can guarantee that a particular home will receive "green electrons." However, consumers can sign up to pay their bills to companies that generate their electricity from renewable sources. In California, the municipal governments of San Diego, Santa Monica and San Jose, as well as the Los Angeles Dodgers, have opted for green power.

The vision of true energy independence—households generating their own energy—has been advanced by developments in PV "solar roofing shingles." A top item on the solar industry's wish list is federal legislation requiring "net metering," which would allow solar-powered homes to cut their bills by sending extra electricity to utilities and running their meters backward. Meanwhile, David Morris of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance advocates more research and development in batteries that could store excess "home-grown" energy, which could "potentially make obsolete a trillion dollars in transmission and distribution lines."

But environmentalists are quick to point out the limits of green consumerism. First, utilities are insisting that ratepayers bail them out for billions of dollars invested in nuclear boondoggles that would otherwise die a quick death in a competitive market. Furthermore, since California's markets opened up in 1998, only 1 percent of the state's consumers have chosen green energy—and that's with a subsidy scheduled to end in 2001. The most optimistic marketers expect that 20 percent of residential customers and 10 percent of commercial customers will choose green power. As Rob Sargent of the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) notes, "The utilities would like nothing better than to use consumer choice as an argument against policies requiring renewable energy."

**Absent any new policies, by 2020 renewable energy is expected to provide just 3 percent of the nation's electricity.**

The utilities argue that in a competitive marketplace there should be no restrictions on giving customers what they want: cheap power. But environmentalists counter that the price of this power doesn't include the environmental costs born by society, including dirty air, dangerous wastes and climate change. Their concern that a focus on narrow, short-term



WARREN GRETZ/NREL

**Wind power is the most rapidly growing source of energy in the world.**

costs could have dire social consequences has already been realized: utilities have slashed investments in energy efficiency by half since the mid-'90s.

Environmentalists have fought some tenacious state-by-state battles to incorporate green energy policies into utility restructuring, with mixed results. Fourteen states have established "public benefits trusts," which tax electricity use to fund renewable energy, energy efficiency and low-income energy programs. Eleven states require that a certain percentage of their electricity be generated by renewables, but these "Renewable Portfolio Standards" (RPS) are largely unambitious. For example, Arizona requires that solar energy supply just 1 percent of the state's power by 2002.

In Congress, environmentalists are supporting a bill introduced by Vermont Republican Sen. Jim Jeffords to add a shade of green to federal restructuring legislation. The bill would establish an RPS of 20 percent renewable energy use (excluding hydropower) by 2020, create a public benefits trust, require utilities to tell consumers how much pollution they produce and place a cap on emissions of carbon dioxide

and other pollutants. It's a much more ambitious bill than the Clinton administration's, which would establish an RPS of only 7.5 percent by 2010. But the Jeffords bill doesn't have universal support among environmentalists, some of whom criticize its failure to prohibit nuclear bailouts and its allowance of emissions trading.

The biggest problem, though, is that it doesn't stand a



chance of passing. The bill doesn't even have the full support of the 151-member House Renewable Energy Caucus or the newly formed 24-member Senate caucus. "If you took a vote today," says Ken Bossong of the Sun Day Campaign, "it would go down in flames."

The bill's poor prospects, Bossong says, stem from the lack of grassroots momentum behind it. Scott Denman of the Safe Energy Communication Council adds, "The movement needs to develop a political base and be much more politically aggressive."

**E**nergy advocacy lost its populist edge in the '80s, Sargent says, when environmentalists and utilities began collaborating, chiefly to promote investments in energy efficiency. Getting a "seat at the table" was a positive thing, he says, but it encouraged environmentalists to forget that "our power is derived from the size of our constituency, not from our access."

Environmentalists trying to overcome this mistake face several key challenges. Today's movement lacks the built-in activist base of opponents to nuclear power that existed in the '70s, when more than 50 nuclear power plants were under construction. Now energy is so far off society's radar screen, most people don't even know where their power comes from. "Most people we talk to think their electricity comes from hydropower," says Andrea Kavanagh of the National Environmental Trust (NET).

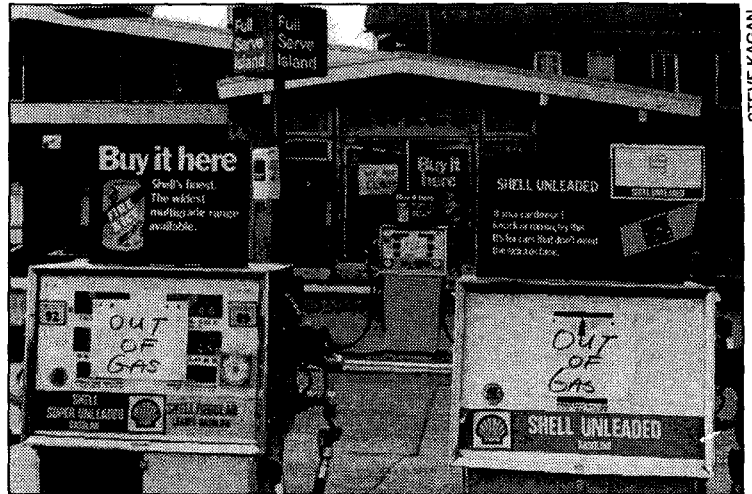
The most ambitious effort to re-energize the movement is Earth Day 2000, chaired by Hayes, an original Earth Day and Sun Day organizer. The focus of Earth Day 2000 is energy and Hayes hopes that the month-long series of events will provide a spark missing from the issue. Lacking the immediate context of an energy crisis or the Three-Mile Island disaster, he says, "we kind of have to create the timeliness of the issue ourselves."

His Earth Day Network claims to have nearly 3,000 groups in 163 countries involved thus far and boasts a flagship event on the mall in Washington on April 22 featuring actor Leonardo DiCaprio. The Earth Day agenda—endorsed by about 500 organizations, including the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and U.S. PIRG—calls for quadrupling federal investments in renewable energy and efficiency in five years and halting subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear power, with a goal of producing at least one-third of the nation's energy from renewables by 2020. In the "changed environment" after Earth Day 2000, Hayes hopes, there will be an opportunity for the environmental movement to achieve such goals.

Not everyone shares his optimism, however. Kalee Kreider of NET acknowledges the tremendous boost recycling received from Earth Day 1980's focus on solid waste, but says she's "not going to plan on a similar bounce for energy." Citing the lack of infrastructure to build on any momentum, Bossong predicts, "A lot of money will be spent, a modest amount of media coverage will be generated and probably nothing will happen."

That said, Bossong himself maintains a database of about 1,000 organizations across the country that have some level of involvement in clean energy issues, including several national outfits with extensive field operations. PIRG, with 27 state-based organizations and six U.S. PIRG field offices,

has campaigns to clean up dirty power plants and promote clean energy. The Sierra Club, with 65 chapters, is focusing its energy program on transportation. Ozone Action has paired up with the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives to help municipal officials take



In the '70s, the future seemed to belong to solar energy.

action against global warming.

The new kid on the block is NET, a group started by the Pew Charitable Trusts in 1994, which organized a "Pollution Solutions" bus tour of 36 cities this fall to demonstrate how people can consume less energy. "You have to build people toward political action," Kreider says. "Most people, as a first dipping of their toes in the energy issue, are not prepared to slam their senator or take on a multinational corporation."

In addition to national organizations, Bossong's database includes approximately 800 state and regional organizations, from the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association to the Northwest Energy Coalition. Local activists—whether they're campaigning to clean up dirty power plants in Massachusetts or to stop nuclear waste storage in Minnesota—are ready to be plugged into national clean energy initiatives. "These battles are creating a constituency for clean energy in a way that I've not seen in a long time," Sargent says.

**O**f course, some groups differ on how the movement should proceed. The NRDC's Ralph Cavanaugh cautions that the fossil fuel industry is "not monolithic," pointing to the key support of some utilities in winning a recent extension of wind energy tax credits and British Petroleum's ownership of one of the nation's largest PV manufacturers. While acknowledging that the coal mining industry has been "unsupportive," Cavanaugh notes that it "is a declining force both economically and politically." He says, "I don't find a lot of organized opposition to renewable energy in general."

But don't tell that to U.S. PIRG, Friends of the Earth or Taxpayers for Common Sense, who have been battling to reduce federal subsidies for fossil fuels. The fiscal year 2000 budget contains \$1.5 million more for coal research and development than last year, a total of \$124 million. Likewise, Rebecca Stanfield of U.S. PIRG maintains that the utility industry's opposition to a national renewables mandate has been "relentless." Sargent adds, "There are some in the envi-



ronmental community who place too much faith in the goodwill and enlightenment of corporate leaders and are unwilling to point the finger at our enemies."

Another question is what place renewable energy has in the environmental movement's clean air agenda. Many environmentalists, some reluctantly, acknowledge that relying more on natural gas, which contains less carbon and other pollutants than coal and oil, is essential to combat global climate change. But a NET fact sheet—to the chagrin of other advocates—goes so far as to declare natural gas a "solution for today," while renewable energy is a "solution for tomorrow."

There are also different views on how fast the renewable energy industry can increase production to meet clean air needs. "You can only ramp up new technologies and industries so fast without creating bottlenecks, increasing costs and creating a backlash," argues Alan Noguee of the Union of Concerned Scientists, who supports the RPS standard in the Jeffords bill. Ironically, he points to nuclear power "as a really good example of an industry that created a lot of its own problems by growing too fast." Hayes disagrees: "Technically, we can do pretty much what we want to pay to do."

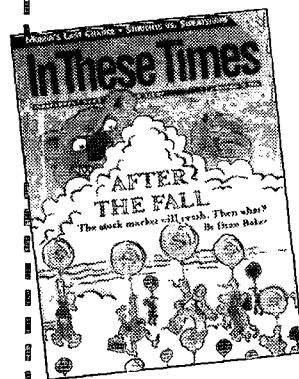
The real issue is political will: The political environment for renewables is not good. Clinton's hallmark has been programs that are big on pronouncements and goals but lack the cash to translate them into action. Members of Congress can greenwash themselves by joining their green energy caucus and then, as Denman says, "stab sustainable energy in the back." The fiscal year 2000 budget of \$247 million for renewables research and development is a decrease of nearly \$20 million from last year, which Scott Sklar of SEIA blames on pre-election shenanigans by congressional Republicans trying to embarrass Vice President Al Gore. However, the environmentalists' own budget recommendations also were down from the previous year. "We slightly tempered our request to make sure we were politically relevant," Sklar says. "It didn't work."

The problem with what is politically relevant is that it may not be enough to save the planet. The Jeffords bill, for example, would freeze utility carbon dioxide emissions at 2000 levels by 2020, while scientists say that emissions reductions of more than 60 percent are necessary to stabilize carbon levels in the atmosphere—and the sooner those cuts are made, the better. Ross Gelbspan, author of *The Heat Is On*, a best-selling book on global warming, charges that environmental organizations involved in the climate change negotiations "are more concerned with their access to government officials than solving the problems with global warming."

To counter this troubling disconnect, Gelbspan and a group of energy experts have proposed their own "World Energy Modernization Plan." The plan calls for the creation of a 0.25 percent tax on international currency transactions, yielding \$150 to \$200 billion for a fund to promote the global adoption of renewable and energy efficient technologies. "Even if people reject the details of the plan," Gelbspan says, "our hope is that it communicates the scope and scale of what's needed to deal with this crisis. The science on what needs to be done is unambiguous." ■

Eric Weltman is a writer and activist in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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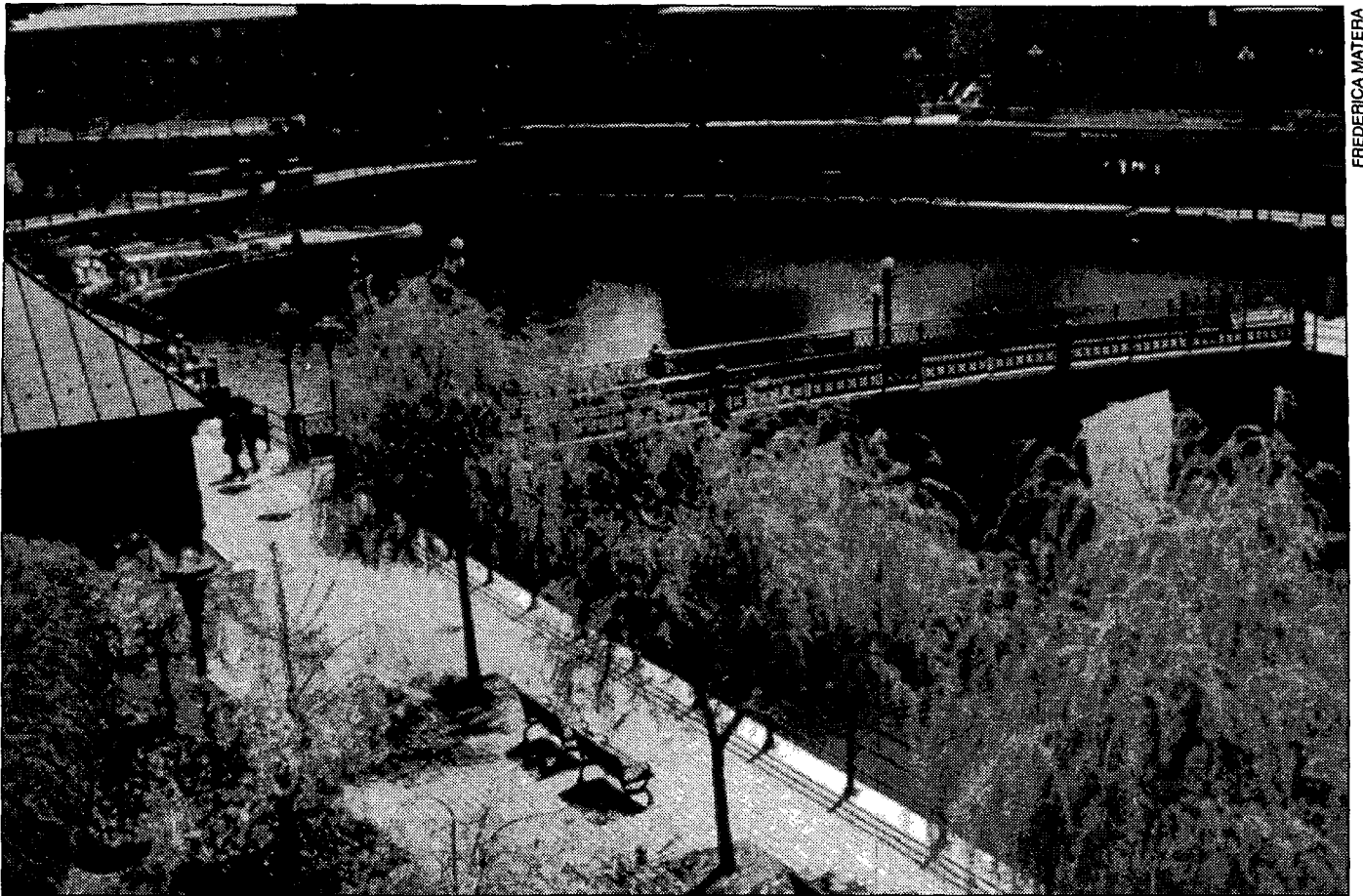
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Decades in the making, Water Place Park in Providence, Rhode Island, designed by architect William Warner, jack-hammered the asphalt—the ultimate brownfield—and shaped a canal and walkway around two once-buried rivers.

# Condemned No More

**T**he story of the trashing of America is yellowing in the pages of our national history and implanted in every corner of the country. It is a story of urban neighborhoods and workplaces that goes like this:

The factory in the city burned. Its charred ruins, no longer worth the upkeep, were fenced off and left to waste away into the ravaged neighborhood. The manufactured widget, gizmo, apparatus, product passed into obsolescence, leaving the venerable company bankrupt and persuading its last generation to lock the factory doors and skip town. The garment, shoe, fabric-maker fled to another state or country to pursue cheap labor, shuttering the old plant and leaving its underground tanks to leak pollutants into the subsoil and water of the old mill town.

Scarred by the past and lacking promise, the tainted sites create an Urban Hall of Infamy. Worst-case scenarios are tarred by their poisons and their past, abused, abandoned, underused. Packed with PCBs, heavy metals, lead and tetrachloroethylene, they're traversed by plumes of oil. They're in the wrong neighborhood (inner city); have the wrong ethnicity (minority); and host the wrong industry—asbestos-encrusted mills, leaky oil tanks, polluting industries from drycleaning to jewelrymaking to battery production.

## The greening of America's industrial wasteland

By Jane Holtz Kay

So why would advocates and urbanists, developers and preservationists take an interest in such orphaned lots? Because, for one reason, these anonymous castoffs now have a name: "brownfields." With that designated label and status from the Environmental Protection Agency has come a constituency to give these sullied sites a second look—and life.

The concept of restoring "brownfields" can only be understood by considering their opposite: the green fields of America. These are the virgin lands on the fringes preferred by subdividers; the 2 million acres of farmlands leveled each year, the forests and fields filled with Wal-Marts and Costcos, the wetlands drained for McMansions and gated subdivisions. They are what William Whyte once called "the last landscape," the final fringe succumbing to the sprawl that drains America's Main Streets and urban cores.



Cleaning close-in brownfields stops that process, restoring the core and stopping the outflow. And overnight, it seems, brownfields have become trendy. "Our universe has grown every month," says Tom Colangelo, managing editor of *Brownfield News*. "You're viewing the explosion of a market." Statistically, that market consists of more than 400,000 contaminated sites, according to the General Accounting Office (GAO). "I think the number may be in the millions," says John Podgurski, head of the New England EPA office, one of 10 EPA regions launching the program and channeling efforts to clean them.

These sites range from one lot to the entire state of Rhode Island. They hold a rainbow of pollutants. One may shelter a furnace-stamping machine, another a defunct tannery, a third a ketchup bottle cap maker—any of the smokestack industries forging, fueling, moving, dumping and polluting America. "Every site has been used for something and it's contaminated," says Charles Bartsch, a pioneer in the field and senior policy analyst for the Northeast-Midwest Institute.

What is the price for cleanup? Some \$650 billion, says the GAO. It, too, could be more. "It's hard to quantify," says Steve Kidney, editor of *Brownfields Report*. "The definition is so nebulous. It's not like saying how many cars are registered in Illinois."

Whatever the type and tally, a new consciousness that brownfield cleanup could stem the urban exodus has won support for a veritable Baedeker of poisonous places: "Recycling America's Land," a 1998 Conference of Mayors report on 47,384 acres of brownfields, rated "deadzones" around cities like New York and Chicago high on its cleanup agenda and multiplied support for reclaiming brownfields. The reasons are obvious: Brownfields are crucial economically, central geographically and vital to the urban neighborhoods they border and to cities short on space. Funds from tax breaks and loans have escalated cleanup and reuse. Hopes are high, sites multiplying.

England, the tight little island that pioneered the field, considers virtually every vacant lot a brownfield and a "brownfields first" program has raised downtown retail development 13 percent, according to *Building Design*. American cities and anti-sprawl advocates have come aboard; with them, developers. "Turn Brown into Green," says one ad in a brownfield magazine. How did this change of complexion occur?

**B**rownfields are the children of the post-industrial age. Heading into the last quarter of the 20th century, these urban catchbasins held the refuse of both America's industry and America's poor and minorities. As the '70s lurched into the environmental age, the air was dirty, the water was dirty, the earth was dirty. In 1978, the wastes turning the backyards of Love Canal into "purple lawns" caused New York to declare a state of emergency. The nation rallied. Two years later, the EPA launched a corrective: the Superfund.

To get corporations to launder their dirty landscapes, the federal government made them responsible for undoing their misdeeds. Alas, the Superfund imperative didn't quite work out that way. As much as 60 percent of the government's Superfund money went to lawyers for polluters; none of the bankers and none of the developers wanted the old Superfund sites; all feared fines. "Superfund: Superfailure," was the title of one tract.

In 1986, the EPA amended the unwieldy Superfund act. It eased cleanup standards to fit the future use of the condemned property: That meant requiring a grade-A cleanup—zero pollution—for, say, a daycare center; a grade-D cleanup for a parking lot. The construction was on. "Shovels first, lawyers later," went the slogan. "Things changed," says the EPA's Podgurski. "The fact that we sat at the table with [polluters]" was one reason. Some financial aid, some relief from legal liability followed.

Over time, the EPA shifted 30,000 Superfund sites to brownfield status. Easing the standards to reflect their future use eased the job of developers. While problems of enforcement and consistent and competent cleanup remain (the dumpers and owners of polluted sites do not instantaneously shed brown skins for green), the process coaxed cooperative cleanup, lessened fear of lawsuits and helped stop the wrangling.

Meanwhile, scouting their landscape for fresh sites and finding only worn ones, urban locales began to sign on to the brownfield movement. In 1988, Minnesota passed the first legislation for voluntary compliance, allowing polluters to sign on to the new standards on their own without governmental indictment. Today, 80 percent of state legislatures have passed brownfield bills. Some 221 sites

## Blight and beauty coexist in most historic ruins, but brownfield sites may be the most haunting.

have received the EPA blessing and \$200,000 for pilot projects; 16 earned "showcase" status, giving them high visibility, some money and technical aid. Agencies from the Corps of Engineers to HUD to Veteran Affairs have joined developers in investing time and money to assess, reclaim and upgrade the landscape.

**I**do volatile organic compounds," Jane Sherman says. "He does history." She nods across the table toward William "Mac" McKenzie Woodward, architectural historian for the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission. Before us on the wall of the downtown office of the Providence Plan, a nonprofit collection of civic planners, hangs a map of the meandering Woonasquatucket River Basin where the colleagues will collaborate on a poisonous sink of waterway rolling 4.4 miles through the toxic shores of two low-income neighborhoods.

It is a warm early spring day and the roiling stream seems to call from the map as they take turns describing the Greenway project initiated by the Providence Plan. And then we are off. "This is the Woonasquatucket River, place where the moose water," says Sherman, picking up our conversation as we drive past the barely visible river. We pull over and make our way to a path beaten down by the youngsters heedless of the poison ivy or ticks on its banks—or the vivid red and yellow signs ("Peligro, Danger") warning the neighbors of the dioxin-laden city sewage coursing through their community. Check out the riverside, Sherman says, and you might find them playing in the debris dumped illegally or fishing in the poisoned river.

For all the secluded charms of our walk, for all the cozy if worn cottages in this historic mill town, the hazardous materials left by

those mills damage the depressed neighborhood. Forty-two percent of Olneyville's children recorded high lead levels. Most of their parents are on their way out. No jobs. No future. The area holds the third-highest vacancy rate in the state.

By foot and car, we trace the rock-strewn waters: past mills fallen and mills beaten, by rubble lots blistering with pollutants yet blessed by the roses that tumble among the pesky knotweed. Blight and beauty coexist in most historic ruins, but brownfield sites may be the most haunting.

Cleaning up will take some doing. The legacy written in the name "West Bleachery Street" lingers on the project's 15 sites. Some 120,000 gallons of oil lace the six-acre tract of the Riverside mill destroyed by a fire almost 10 years ago. Across

## The legacy written in the name "West Bleachery Street" lingers on one project's 15 polluted sites.

the river at the burned out Lincoln Lace & Braid, rivulets of oil drip into the water of its nine-acre site. "That's tank heaven down there," says Woodward, as we stand beneath two rust-stained sofas dangling from the dead trees. All around us other discards reflect how the abandonment draws drug dealers. "As long as you don't have eyes here, you're going to have more crime," Woodward says.

The bad news is that it will cost \$500,000 to clean the site. The good news is that 60 percent of the area lies in public hands, a benefit to the community once reclaimed. With plans drawn, \$200,000 gone to assess the soil and partnerships with HUD and the Corps of Engineers secured, redevelopment could add as many as 100 new jobs here, plus link to 13 other sites in the riverfront restoration, Sherman says.

Striding along the riverway, her graying dark hair tied loosely behind her head, her conviction palpable, Sherman sees beyond the battered buildings and fading memories to the shared future shaped at community meetings. "Everybody had a story to tell of water, where they went to talk or read or think," she recalls. "It really brought home the need for quiet, for nature in the neighborhood. The people are lucky because we really have something they can use if we can open it up."

Instead of the ravaged edges, Sherman sees shaped space. A canoe run. A walkway. A bike path connected to the East Coast Greenway. She sees almost half the people of the inner core now denied mobility given decent public transportation and access to jobs rising from the toxic ashes of the past.

Critics have long blamed environmentalists and preservationists for wearing blinders, closing institutional eyes to the poor. Brownfield programs help remove them. "This is a real perspective shift serving a population that has not been seen aligned with environmental issues," Woodward says.

**F**or all the Cinderella stories, brownfields provoke questions for preservationists, too. A ballbearing plant turned into the monoculture of a golf course. A new big box store that fills a waste dump competing, like any other big box store, with Main Street. A highway ramp crashing down an old mill to allow access to "open space" and parking to "rescue" its adjacent mills.

Consider Lowell, Massachusetts, that El Dorado on the Merrimac, another "showcase" city. America's great industri-

al birthplace recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of the nation's first urban National Park, and the attention shows. To see the polyglot vitality of this city of 105,000, observe the street life of students, shoppers, tourists and residents mingling at the bus stop in the late afternoon sun. In downtown Lowell, you can get a taste of Saigon or Paris, a Burger King bite or a Barnes & Noble cappuccino. Visit a barber, a shoemaker or a gift shop for the tourists who fill the once empty stores along Central Street.

Paces away, chief planner Anne Barton takes me on Lowell's "before" and "after" brownfield tour. Sitting behind her dreamboat Chevy, Barton begins at the Northern Canal Area near the post office not far from downtown. We see a duo of second-string ("take me out to the minors") sports stadiums. "Paul E. Tsongas Arena," says the first, named for the congressman who launched Lowell's National Park. Here, a former mill site laced with lead, oil and organic waste was cleaned for \$1 million, then turned into a hockey league locale for \$23 million more (with an extra \$4 million for landscaping). The benefit of the project, Barton says, is life to the city. The second, a former ash dump and junkyard, was turned into yet another stadium, a baseball park: \$1 million for cleanup plus \$15 million for the park. Conclusion: Not a great start. Can't brownfields do better than this cliché of urban comeback?

But elsewhere on our safari, there is much to commend. The revitalized Currier Printing buildings are broken down into cozy doorways. Elsewhere, a 90,000 square-foot brick building now offers social programs, daycare, parent and elderly services to the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association Project, serving one of the country's largest Asian populations. Less happily, intrusive angle parking juts out from the Gateway Center's brownfield makeover, disrupting the walkable flow of the downtown sidewalk. Doesn't this violate the canon of urban design? "The developers said they couldn't lease the property without the parking," Barton explains, accepting the car-based market "wisdom."

"You do the best you can," Peter Aucella comments, and not too cheerfully, describing the fate of the Gilmore Trust, a '20s building crumbling to extinction after 15 or 20 years of abuse. The assistant superintendent for buildings at the Lowell National Park recalls the city's road to neglect to remind you of "how far we've come," citing the cooperative Lowell Plan, the progress of brownfields and, less happily, the slow payment of a promised \$2.8 million that went with EPA designation.

Yet for all the real estate troubles, the drive to restoration and reclamation that comes here and elsewhere could transform America's urban wastelands into greenfields and good earth. Brownfield programs promise a departure from America's way of trash-and-leave. From coast to coast, a larger faith emerges that the scouring of brownfields can end greenfield destruction, elevate urban America and clean the environment. "What good is a house when you don't have a tolerable planet to build it on," Thoreau famously asked. This civic cleanup is a chance to transform America's wasted urban backyards into gateways for our future—and the planet's. ■

**Jane Holtz Kay** is an architecture critic and author of *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back*.



# The Writing on the Wall

By Kari Lydersen

On one wall a stolid Latina woman with wide eyes and a strong neck stands in front of a grim industrial landscape of machinery and oil wells. On the ceiling above her, a sun with thick lips and eyes closed in resignation or despair shines on tumbling nude bodies and airplanes. This is Diego Rivera's famous *Allegory of California* mural at the City Lunch Club of San Francisco.

Several hundred miles to the south in a Los Angeles barrio, the Virgin of Guadalupe decorates the wall of a botanica, with a young Latino gang member kneeling before her in prayer and the words *vida loca* emblazoned in curly script. There is a background of dreamy flowers and clouds and further to the right Jesus rises above a cross. This is *Memories of Homies*, a memorial to some of the later casualties of the California Rivera portrayed in his mural.

**Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco's Public Murals**  
By Anthony W. Lee  
University of California Press  
264 pages, \$24.95

**Wallbanging: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.**  
By Susan A. Phillips  
University of Chicago Press  
383 pages, \$25

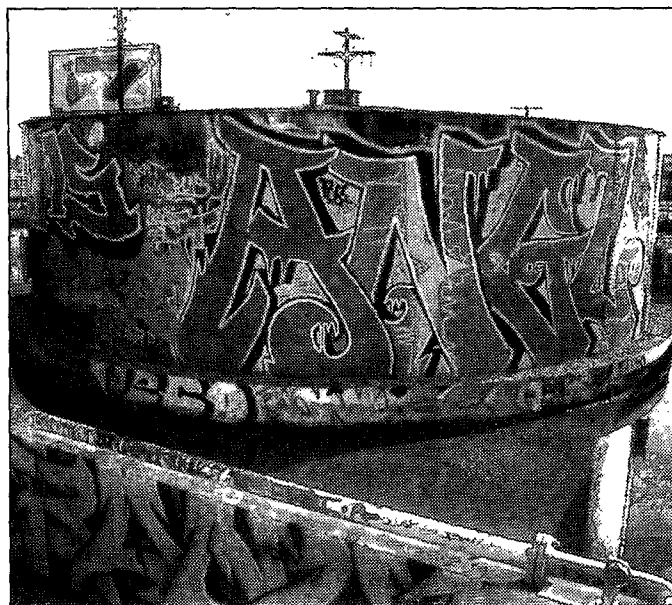
Paid for by wealthy capitalist patrons or the federal government, the San Francisco murals of the '30s and '40s have decorated some of the city's most respected institutions and landmarks. Many world-famous artists painted these murals, which were debated and critiqued tirelessly in the press and academic journals. Most gang graffiti in L.A.'s barrios and ghettos, on the other hand, will never be seen by members of the ruling class. It is painted on run-down, abandoned buildings and the walls of public housing projects, by youth who likely will never make their way into a newspaper

except as part of the police blotter.

But as described in two recent books, *Wallbanging: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* by Susan Phillips and *Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics and San Francisco's Public Murals* by Anthony Lee, the two forms of public painting share much in common as means of communication and dissent.

Muralism got its formal start in San Francisco with the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915, though the form had been around in various ways for many years. These first murals were heroic, lush, decorative panels that used Greco-Roman imagery to trumpet the progress of man as embodied in industrialization and the taming of nature. Wealthy corporate behemoths funded the exposition, and it clearly served their interests. The art was intended to pacify the masses, to show that the city was paying attention to them even while it was denying them basic needs and services. "The job of public art in this environment was to help transform private interests into the general interest and to displace the issue of public services with that of public art," Lee writes. "Public mural painting was to be a sign of public consent to centralized control."

The celebrated Mexican muralist Diego Rivera was the first to bring leftist politics to the murals of San Francisco. But he accomplished this through decidedly unleftist channels. Rivera's work was introduced to the wealthy patrons William Gerstle, Timothy Pflueger and Albert Bender by intermediaries, and in 1928 Rivera was brought to San Francisco for a mural commission. U.S. Ambassador to



SUSAN PHILLIPS

A water tank in Los Angeles.

Mexico Dwight Morrow played a significant role in soliciting Rivera's work as part of his orders "to stabilize Mexican-American relations and secure U.S. individual holdings in the country." By letting his art be used as a public symbol of friendship between the two countries, Rivera would be contributing to the U.S. government's efforts to solidify public opinion on both sides of the border regarding trade and political links with Mexico.

Rivera was a member of the Mexican Communist Party at the time, a fact that led to considerable outcry when he was given the commission. But his relationship with the party was tumultuous and his ego and artistic ambition, among other things, frequently came between him and other comrades (including prominent artists like David Siqueiros). The party finally kicked him out in 1929 after countless power struggles and conflicts with other members over political and personal issues. "He vacillated between, on the one hand, sympathy for a generally Marxist platform and a desire to commit his energies to social and political reform, and on the other, the realization that he had just betrayed the Mexican Communist Party for his own artistic ambitions," Lee writes.

Nonetheless, Rivera introduced an

**Diego Rivera's *Making a Fresco, Showing the Building of a City*, in which the painter's ample backside faces his wealthy backers.**

overtly political and leftist sensibility into the San Francisco mural movement. His *Allegory of California*, ironically located at the City Lunch Club of the Stock Exchange, on the surface bore resemblance to San Francisco's earlier murals. But it also depicted thinly veiled attacks on industrialization and American capitalist "progress." He followed *Allegory* with *Making a Fresco, Showing the Building of a City* at the California School of Fine Arts. A painting within a painting, the mural showed Rivera himself working on a mural, with his wealthy patrons behind him, and his ample backside turned toward them in what many saw as an insult to the rich men.

The mural portrayed Rivera as a worker himself, and was a precursor to the coming close ties between muralists and the waterfront labor movement. "A new idea for public murals began to emerge, proclaimed by a new set of actors with their own arguments about imagery and audience," Lee writes. "Rivera's two extraordinary murals were at the heart of this shift."

Two young radical artists from Eastern Europe, Victor Arnautoff and Bernard Zakheim, followed Rivera's lead. "In these two artists the city had mural painters who were part of an emergent, coalescing radical circle that could speak directly and knowledgeably to Rivera's ideas," Lee writes. "The leftist painting scene, moreover, was initially populated by immigrants; it arose in conjunction with ethnic cultural centers and neighborhood social spots." Along with radical poet Kenneth Rexroth and other local artists, they formed a fiercely politicized public art movement centered in the financial district's Montgomery Block, or "Monkey Block" area. From 1929 through the mid-'30s, the movement worked in tandem with organized labor, especially the militant waterfront unions.



During the Big Strike of 1934, they marched, demonstrated, joined picket lines and used their artistic talents for agitprop graphic work.

But by the late '30s, the radical mural movement had dissipated through sectarian battles and the artists' movement into easel work. Rivera had left San Francisco altogether by 1931 to return to Mexico, where he painted such caustic works as the *Burlesque of Mexican Folklore and Politics* before a four-year dry spell starting in 1936. The San Francisco art world turned its attention more toward the painting coming out of France and Germany, including the abstract works of Chagall, Picasso and Matisse.

**T**he gang graffiti writers of contemporary L.A. can be seen, in a sense, as descendants of Rivera and his comrades. But compared to the institutional birth of San Francisco's murals, gang graffiti has always come from the grassroots of the community. Phillips explains that its roots are in the Chicano *pachuco* graffiti of the '60s and earlier, and it has developed into a complicated and decorative art and literary form in African-American and Latino communities. Gang graffiti is a manifes-

tation of a social and economic system developed entirely apart from the dominant structure. Though gang graffiti can be seen as a political protest in that it claims public space, on a more concrete level gang graffiti ignores the dominant system rather than participating in or protesting it.

Gang graffiti is obviously never sanctioned or funded by corporations or the government, and in changing or more middle-class areas city governments will spend thousands of dollars and countless manpower hours to fight it. But in the neighborhoods in the heart of L.A. where Phillips did her research, gang graffiti will usually go untouched by authorities. The isolation and poverty in these areas is so extreme that they are de facto "liberated" zones, where gangs use graffiti to express the alternative power structures they have created. "Though I don't deny their life-threatening components, gang membership works most powerfully as a form of empowerment and protection, a net that people have woven to keep themselves from falling any lower," Phillips writes.

Phillips boldly and sensitively counteracts the hysteria surrounding gangs and gang graffiti, attacking the crimi-



nalization of minority youth through clear and simple descriptions of her interactions with gang members and the actual meaning of their graffiti. She treats graffiti with respect from the outset, approaching it as an art and communication form as deserving of intense study and critique as the San Francisco murals. "The graffiti of Los Angeles is the graffiti of groups that Los Angeles has created—through its history, its segregation, its illusion of complacency and contentment," Phillips writes. "These are our native sons. They are what make Los Angeles a monument to itself and the graffiti capital in a world of illicit words."

Both the radical murals of Rivera, Zakheim and Arnautoff and the graffiti of the L.A. gangs are meant to communicate to a group of peers and to play a role in a struggle against an enemy. But in the case of the muralists, the enemy is corporate society and the powers that be, the same people who funded and facilitated the murals in the first place. For the gangs, the "enemy" are black or Chicano youth almost indistinguishable from themselves, except by where they happen to live. Both create a dialogue on the walls that is usually too convoluted and subtle to be understood by anyone unfamiliar with the groups.

Gangs joust on walls in creative and even whimsical ways that often replace

actual physical conflict. Rival gang graffiti is crossed out and replaced with new gang tags or insults. The complicated symbolism of letters and numbers is used with seemingly nonsensical or even humorous results. For example, the Bloods refuse to use the

**The racial and class connotations of graffiti, not its actual messages, are what make it threatening (and illegal).**

letter C (for Crips) anywhere in their work; Compton becomes "Bompton." Gangs also assign derogatory nicknames to their rivals; "Culver City" becomes "Ca Ca City" and 18th Street is "Faketeen Street." Gang members will cross out letters or numbers that are associated with rival gangs anywhere they may appear in their own names and pieces.

The leftist murals were controversial and threatening because of their outwardly political content. More than the images, of course, it was the links to labor power, mass dissent and ethnic

minorities and immigrants that disturbed the status quo. In the case of contemporary L.A. gang graffiti, however, it is solely the connotations of the marks, not the actual messages, that make it threatening (and illegal). The actual words and markings in modern gang tags are usually indecipherable to outsiders. Even if they are legible, the words in gang graffiti usually consist of names like "Puppet" or "Grumpy" and locations like "36th Street"—nothing to cause hysteria in and of itself.

But gang graffiti, and even non-gang-related hip-hop graffiti, is so inextricably tied with crime, drugs and violence in the American psyche that it is immediately seen as an indicator of a "bad" neighborhood, a place where one might be robbed, assaulted or shot. And of course it implies the presence of young male minorities, the most feared segment of U.S. society. In this way graffiti is much more threatening to the government and mainstream society than even the most radical mural. While a mural is promoting the idea of an overthrow of power, graffiti shows that at least in this limited space, oppressed people have already formed an alternative structure of power—and are expressing it through a medium that has served that purpose for centuries. ■

Kari Lydersen is associate editor of the Chicago newspaper *Streetwise*.

## The Ventriloquist

By Summi Kaipa

Last spring, hundreds of people gathered in Shambaugh Auditorium at the University of Iowa, crowding in the aisles and sitting on stage, waiting to be mesmerized by John Ashbery's intelligence and wit—and they were.

What the audience came to witness was a man who has, over the past half-century, been seriously engaged with the craft of writing. Ashbery is fondly remembered as one of the last living New York School poets, a colleague of Frank O'Hara and James Schuyler. He has written numerous volumes of poetry including *Some Trees*, which early in his career received the Yale Younger Poets

Prize. He was also awarded a Pulitzer Prize for one of his most famous works, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*.

**Girls on the Run**  
By John Ashbery  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
96 pages, \$20

Perhaps the trademark of Ashbery's poems is his earnest yet ironic voice in a contemporary world. His narrators are self-conscious of their limitations, allowing for a poetry of vulnerability. Often, they are cautious not to take

themselves too seriously, opting instead for humor to deflate overly sentimental impulses. In the highly acclaimed book *Flow Chart* (1992), for example, both men and women narrate what appears to be semi-soliloquy, semi-dialogue poetry, infused with a myriad of art and popular culture references and a possibly autobiographical speaker who constantly toys with multiple registers of emotion. Thus, a full range of commonplace experiences, such as washing hands, as well as the experience of grappling with a poem, finding "yourself inside a huge pen or panopticon," stumble into Ashbery's world:

That was the first time you washed  
your hands,  
and how monumental it seems now.  
Those days the wind blew only



Henry Darger's Vivian Girls, shown here in a detail from *Untitled—Side A* (1950), are the basis for John Ashbery's long poem *Girls on the Run*.

"privilege" that the speaker of *Girls* mentions can, at the very least, be construed as an inquiry into gender, particularly in light of Darger's impulse to paint penises on his young female characters who fight to preserve their innocence—imbuing the girls with a capacity to fight back via a change in gender.

from one quarter;  
one was forced to make snap  
judgments, though the norms  
unfolded naturally enough,  
constructing themselves, and it wasn't  
until you found yourself inside  
a huge pen  
or panopticon that you realized the  
story had disappeared like  
water into desert sand,  
although it still continued.

**T**rue to the aesthetics and politics of the New York School poets, who were famous for their interactions with visual artists, Ashbery has often considered the relationship of visual art to poetry. His latest book of poems, *Girls on the Run*, confronts the work of painter Henry Darger, a man who has recently gained popularity as an "outsider" artist. Darger, who was orphaned as a child and was said to have lived a relatively reclusive adult life, died in 1972. At that time, Nathan Lerner, a Chicago photographer who was Darger's landlord, found in Darger's apartment an epic painted in watercolors and written on scraps of paper entitled *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. The story chronicles the

plight of seven young girls constantly at war with the evil forces of the world.

*Girls on the Run* is Ashbery's exploration of Darger's picaresque epic, a take-off on the phantasmagorical and latently sexual impulses in the painter's work. The poem interacts with the epic genre, and often humorously toys with the possibilities inherent in Darger's work. *Girls* chronicles subtle eroticism, "Having / to pee ruins my crinoline relentlessly, / because it comes only ecstatically." It also encompasses the fear and ecstasy of being ruined by the enemy—in the multiple senses of "being ruined"—and ruining the world:

I don't want to be around when the gang erupts into centuries of inviolate privilege, and cisterns tumble down the side of the slope, and all is gone more or less naturally to hell. To which Dimples replied, Why not? Why not just give yourself, one time, to the floods of human resources that are our day? Because I don't want to live at an angle to the blokes who micromanage our territory, that's all.

The implications of Ashbery's meditation—"inviolate privilege" or "the blokes who micromanage our territory"—are certainly political considerations relevant to the present. The

Ashbery's use of "privilege" should not be confined to a monolithic interpretation. Much of *Girls* focuses on the engagement and disengagement of the body with respect to sexuality, dreams and various social struggles.

*Girls* is filled with fantasy and disaster, with inherent cultural questions and concerns that are extracted from Darger's Vivian Girls. But while Ashbery's book-length poem is often impressive in its sensibility, the text rarely reflects beyond the confines of the subject at hand: Darger's epic.

What's more disappointing is the impression that Ashbery's poem is a simple verbal interpretation of the narrative of the Vivian Girls, which raises a number of concerns about highlighting the work of an outsider artist. Ashbery seems unconscious of how his work might undermine the authority and autonomy of Henry Darger, who, according to most sources, never meant for his work to be viewed. In turn, the cultural pertinence of the poetry is questioned—without the presence of Darger's intent, is the poetry just an exercise in putting words in the Vivian Girls' mouths? ■

**Summi Kaipa**, a recent graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, is a freelance writer in San Francisco.



# Sentimental Journey

By Joshua Rothkopf

**D**jango Reinhardt was a gypsy guitarist from France who played perfect jazz in the '30s. Listen to him—preferably on a cozy Sunday afternoon—and you'll hear all those things beyond words: euphoria, grace, rapture.

**Sweet and Lowdown**  
Directed by Woody Allen

**Cradle Will Rock**  
Directed by Tim Robbins

They just flow out of Django (the name is perfect too); his were hands that improved even after the loss of two fingers in a caravan fire. It's likely the music just wouldn't let him stop.

The passion of the artist—unchecked, unappreciated, undivided—is the subject of Woody Allen's 30th film, *Sweet and Lowdown*, and Django is its presiding god, quietly imposing his legend on another guitar player, also great but destined to linger in his shadow, hampered by fate and ego. "The guy haunts me," says now-forgotten jazz great Emmet Ray (Sean Penn) in his rare moments of modesty; like Zelig, he's the fictional creation of a movie that occasionally poses, charmingly, as a bit of scholarship complete with tributes from, among others, jazz critic Nat Hentoff and Woody himself. But for most of it, we're swirled up in a highball of white suits and Packards and jazz-era dreaminess and—just before we would float away—Emmet himself, unexpectedly flawed and fragile.

Emmet, for all of his boasting about being a "true artist," is something of a small-time Charlie, but likeable for other scruffy reasons besides his undeniable talent: He gets a genuine thrill from taking dates down to the tracks to shoot rats with a pistol and he steals ashtrays from his gigs. Penn gets it all amazingly right, strutting and twitching in constant advertisement, until he settles down to play—and it's a glorious reprieve from himself. Emmet's the kind of guy who sees himself gliding down to loving audiences on a crescent yellow moon; he actually comes close to a rough-hewn version of his fantasy,

but the wooden contraption plummets hilariously. He takes it out back and burns it: "See? Everybody's dreams go up in smoke."

Grand gestures like this are what he's about, though. Emmet's big-mouth attitude is an art parallel to his effortless playing (the great soloist on the score is Howard Alden) and Penn revs the performance from mere vanity to a fascinating insecurity. He's so clearly helpless to the sway of his mysterious genius that it bothers him. Later, when someone earnestly asks him about his process—what he's thinking when his face registers those subtle twitches to the music—he offers pensively, "That I'm underpaid."

Allen's without peer when it comes to this kind of crisp evocation of a period in shorthand, distilled from twice-told

But there are more jazz experts waiting to recall their favorite Emmet stories, and with this complicating device Allen begins to riff discordantly on the winsome Chaplinesque harmonies he's established, even at one point offering three alternate versions of a single scene. The effect is destabilizing and a welcome one from a filmmaker who has, in the past, spared his rose-tinted fables the uneasiness of his graver contemporary stories (as if neurosis was an invention of the Upper West Side). His splintering narrative takes a great leap in sophistication as it begins to chase after a life that grows increasingly shaggier, though no less shiny. Uma Thurman swoops around for a while as a smitten debutante with jutting jaw, as do some gangsters and even Django himself.

Allen, pushing his writing like never before, roughs it up so much that he skillfully topples his own nostalgia—even for a final nod to Fellini's *La Strada*—in a way that ultimately feels true to the lonely spirit of gypsy jazz gui-



Emily Watson and John Turturro risk going to jail for a forbidden musical.

jazz reminiscences and winking popular myths; his introduction of a waifish girl named Hattie—mute from childhood and the perfect listener—who falls for Emmet's bluster seems in keeping with the game, if a little tired. (Samantha Morton resourcefully saves the part from preciousness; to her credit, Hattie never seems wholly dependent.)

In the end, music alone can't save this musician from himself; a less courageous movie might have rested on that claim. But Allen plays it out to its proper melancholic cadence.

**T**im Robbins' new film, *Cradle Will Rock*, draws from a similar well of '30s romanticism—it generally concerns

DEMMIE TODD/TOUCHSTONE PICTURES



Ruben Blades as Diego Rivera.

the turbulent battles of leftist artists working for the doomed Federal Theater Project in New York—but perhaps because it's more expressly political, the film seems content to let its heroes stand and fall like statues.

Still, what statues: Robbins hoists a sprawling agitprop monument to what comes off as a pivotal cultural moment, one assembled from several notorious showdowns into a "mostly true story," as a beginning title says. There's the beleaguered production of the eponymous musical itself, a then timely dramatization of striking steelworkers that might have seasoned the taste for controversy in its young director, Orson Welles. (He's played broadly here by Scottish actor Angus MacFadyen, who excites the small role into an effective caricature.)

Welles and his producer, John Houseman (Cary Elwes), would go on to create the Mercury Theater and *Citizen Kane*. This film occurs before all that, and Robbins contrasts them unflatteringly (but I suspect accurately) as opportunistic hotheads compared to their show's impassioned writer—Marc Blitzstein (Hank Azaria), who carries on imaginary rants with Brecht—and its struggling cast, who rise to the call in defiance of their union and without paychecks. (John Turturro is especially good as a proud Italian actor who won't let his children sing Fascist anthems.)

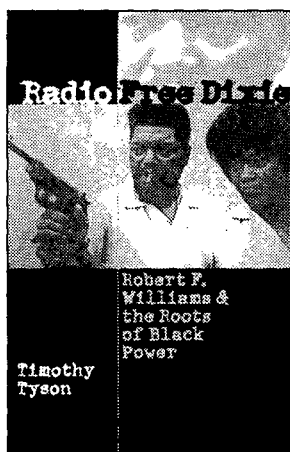
After being shut down by armed soldiers on the eve of its premiere, the production sneaks over to a nearby the-

ater, The Venice, for a single defiant show on a bare stage with just a piano. This bit of history is the longish climax of Robbins' film and, as presented here with bittersweet urgency, the last gasp of publicly funded socialist theater. Other artists don't fare as well: A communist mural by Diego Rivera (Ruben Blades) is ordered to be chipped away by its fickle patron, a young Nelson Rockefeller (John Cusack)

fearfully drawn to the wild artists. As a director, Robbins indulges a warm generosity for performance—possibly learned from his work with Robert Altman—and his high-powered ensemble puts the stridency over well. But it's a waste of this group that they have little

else to do but be fervid. The more memorable sketches lurk on the periphery of the action: Bill Murray as a conflicted ventriloquist whose dummy turns Red on him; Vanessa Redgrave as a wealthy patroness, the Countess La Grange, swept up in the bohemian crusade; Susan Sarandon as the paradoxical Margherita Sarfatti, a Jewish publicist and fundraiser for Mussolini, her former lover.

All the faces and voices culminate into something approaching a fierce cinematic activism and Robbins deserves praise for maintaining the degree of focus he does. But his agenda is limited to begin with—it's pitched closer to elegy than provocation—and that makes for a cynical dead-end of a movie: Zooming in on a small section of Rivera's mural that survived the hydraulic drill, he's trying to imply the tenacious remnants of hope. But a paint chip is cold comfort in light of the film's final shot, a graceful rise from a sad procession of ousted vaudevillians, turning finally to reveal the Disneyfied Times Square of today—a garish playground of total apathy. Now that's progress. ■



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**SYLVIA**

### *the Woman who's easily irritated*

Isn't it enough  
that the rich  
have better  
cars than the  
rest of us?

Now LUXURY  
Automobiles  
come equipped  
with satellite  
navigational  
systems...



they don't  
even have  
to get lost  
anymore!  
Shouldn't  
they accept...

SOME KIND OF  
HANDICAP, LIKE  
STONES IN THEIR  
SHOES?

I'm sure they'd  
be glad to...  
ON A VOLUNTEER  
BASIS.





Continued from page 30

I am honorary president of the American Humanist Association, having succeeded the late, great, spectacularly prolific writer and scientist Dr. Isaac Asimov in that essentially functionless capacity. At an AHA memorial service for my predecessor I said, "Isaac is up in Heaven now." That was the funniest thing I could have said to an audience of humanists. It rolled them in the aisles. Mirth! Several minutes had to pass before something resembling solemnity could be restored.

I made that joke, of course, before my first near-death experience—the accidental one.

So when my own time comes to join the choir invisible or whatever, God forbid, I hope someone will say, "He's up in Heaven now." Who really knows? I could have dreamed all this.

My epitaph in any case? "Everything was beautiful. Nothing hurt." I will have gotten off so light, whatever the heck it is that was going on.

My late Uncle Alex Vonnegut, my father's kid brother, a Harvard-educated life insurance agent in Indianapolis who was well read and wise, was a humanist like all the rest of the family. What Uncle Alex found particularly objectionable about human beings in general was that they so seldom noticed it when they were happy.

He himself did his best to acknowledge it when times were sweet. We could be drinking lemonade in the shade of an apple tree in the summertime, and Uncle Alex would interrupt the conversation to say, "If this isn't nice, what is?"

I myself say that out loud at times of easy, natural bliss: "If this isn't nice, what is?" Perhaps others can also make use of that heirloom from Uncle Alex. I find it really cheers me up to keep score out loud that way.

During today's controlled near-death experience, I spoke to John Wesley Joyce, dead at 65, former cop and minor league ball player, owner of the Lion's Head Bar in Greenwich Village from 1966 until it went bust in 1996. His was the country's most famous hangout for heavy-drinking, non-stop-talking writers in America. One wag described the clientele as "drinkers with writing problems."

The late Mr. Joyce said it was the writers who made it their club of their own accord, which hadn't pleased him all that much. He said he installed a jukebox in the hopes it would interfere with their talking. But they kept coming. "They just had to talk a lot louder," he said.

During what has been almost a year of interviewing completely dead people, while only half dead myself, I asked Saint Peter again and again if I could meet a particular hero of

mine. He is my fellow Hoosier, the late Eugene Victor Debs of Terre Haute, Indiana. He was five times the Socialist Party's candidate for president back when this country still had a strong Socialist Party.

Eugene Victor Debs was waiting for me at the far end of the blue tunnel.

And then, guess what, yesterday afternoon none other than Eugene Victor Debs, organizer and leader of the first successful strike against a major American industry, the railroads, was waiting for me at the far end of the blue tunnel. We hadn't met before. This great American died in 1926 at the age of 71 when I was only 4 years old.

I thanked him for words of his, which I quote again and again in lectures: "As long as there is a lower class, I am in it. As long as there is a criminal element, I am of it. As long as there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

He asked me how those words were received here on Earth in America nowadays. I said they were ridiculed. "People snicker and snort," I said. He asked what our fastest growing industry was. "The building of prisons," I said.

"What a shame," he said. And then he asked me how the Sermon on the Mount was going over these days. And then he spread his wings and flew away.

It is late in the afternoon of February 3, 1998. I have just been unstrapped from a gurney following another controlled near-death experience in this busy execution chamber in Huntsville, Texas.

For the first time in my career, I was actually on the heels of a celebrity as I made my way down the blue tunnel to Paradise. She was Karla Faye Tucker, the born-again murderer of two strangers with a pickax. Karla Faye was completely killed here, by the State of Texas, shortly after lunchtime.

Two hours later, on another gurney, I myself was made only three-quarters dead. I caught up with Karla Faye in the tunnel, about a 150 yards from the far end, near the Pearly Gates. Since she was dragging her feet, I hastened to assure her that there was no Hell waiting for her, no Hell waiting for anyone. She said that was too bad because she would be glad to go to Hell if only she could take the governor of Texas with her. "He's a murderer, too," said Karla Faye. "He murdered me."

Dr. Jack Kevorkian supervises my trip to near death and back. Your reporter from the Afterlife has to sign off now. Jack and I have been asked to vacate the lethal injection facility, which must be prepared for yet another total execution.

Speaking for both of us, I now say, ta-ta and adios. Or, as Saint Peter said to me, with a sly wink, when I told him I was on my last round-trip to Paradise: "See you later, Alligator." ■

Kurt Vonnegut's God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian, from which this story was excerpted, has just been published by Seven Stories Press.

He asked what our fastest growing industry was. "The building of prisons." I said.

By Kurt Vonnegut

**M**y first near-death experience was an accident, a botched anesthesia during a triple bypass. I

had listened to several people on TV talk shows who had gone down the blue tunnel to the Pearly Gates, and even beyond the Pearly Gates, or so they said, and then came back to life again. But I certainly wouldn't have set out on such a risky expedition on purpose, without first having survived one, and then planned another in cooperation with Dr. Jack Kevorkian and the staff at the state-of-the-art lethal injection execution facility at Huntsville, Texas.

I hope the following reports convey a sense of immediacy. They were taped in the tiled Huntsville death chamber only five minutes or so after I was unstrapped from the gurney. The tape recorder, incidentally, like the gurney, was the property of the good people of Texas, and was ordinarily used to immortalize the last words of persons about to make a one-way, all-expenses-paid trip to Paradise.

There will be no more round trips for me, barring another accident. For the sake of my family, I am trying to reinstate my health and life insurance policies, if possible. But other journalists, and perhaps even tourists, will surely

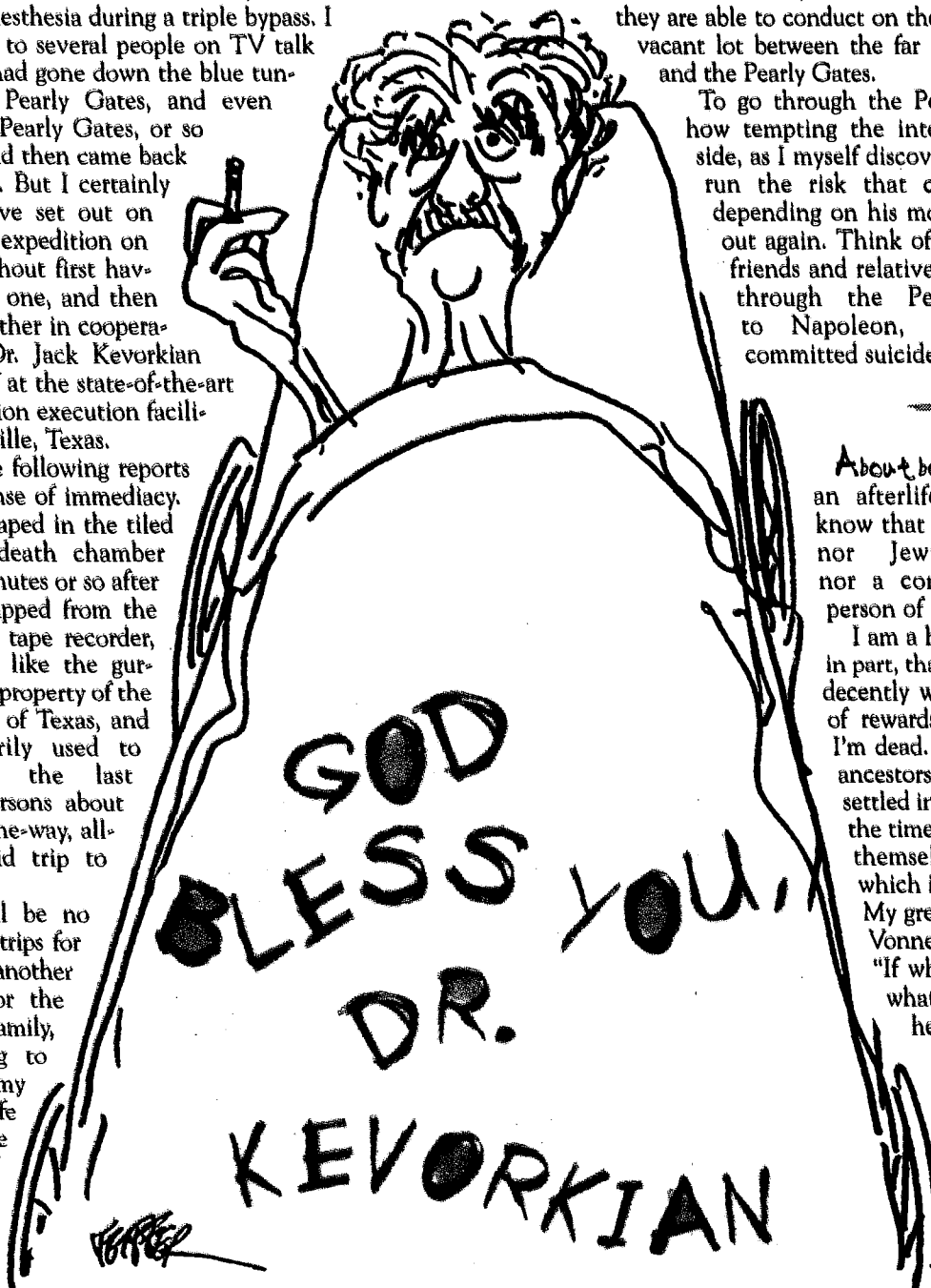
follow the safe two-way path to Eternity I pioneered. I beg them to be content, as I learned to be, with interviews they are able to conduct on the hundred yards or so of vacant lot between the far end of the blue tunnel and the Pearly Gates.

To go through the Pearly Gates, no matter how tempting the interviewee on the other side, as I myself discovered the hard way, is to run the risk that crotchety Saint Peter, depending on his mood, may never let you out again. Think of how heartbroken your friends and relatives would be if, by going through the Pearly Gates to talk to Napoleon, say, you in effect committed suicide.

About belief or lack of belief in an afterlife: Some of you may know that I am neither Christian nor Jewish nor Buddhist, nor a conventionally religious person of any sort.

I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without any expectation of rewards or punishments after I'm dead. My German-American ancestors, the earliest of whom settled in our Middle West about the time of our Civil War called themselves "Freethinkers," which is the same sort of thing. My great grandfather Clemens Vonnegut wrote, for example, "If what Jesus said was good, what can it matter whether he was God or not?"

I myself have written, "If it weren't for the message of mercy and pity in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, I wouldn't want to be a human being. I would just as soon be a rattlesnake."



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